ADVENT AND ASCENSION

FAUNCE

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Advent and Ascension

Or

How Jesus Came and How He Left Us

By

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"A Young Man's Difficulties with his Bible," "Prayer as a Theory and as a Fact," "Shall We Believe in a Divine Providence?" etc., etc.

New York: Eaton & Mains
Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye

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EXPLANATORY NOTE.

CHRISTIANITY, defined in terms of conduct, is that course of action which accords with the requirements of Christ; defined in terms of life, it is that vital experience which comes from contact of the Spirit of Christ with the human soul; defined in terms of doctrine, it is the teaching of Jesus and his apostles; defined in its more general historic aspect, it is that unique development which, commencin with Christ himself, has extended through the Christian centuries; but defined specifically and distinctively, it is *that series of events belonging to the earthly career of Jesus Christ which began with the Advent and closed with the Ascension.*

These two events of his peculiar advent and of his peculiar ascension, if duly proved, carry with them a peculiar intervening life in harmony with the events themselves.

In this little volume it is proposed to discuss certain questions, first of all, concerning the advent and then certain other questions concerning the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ—these latter considered as the two parts of a single event.

In the first chapter, on "Preliminary Questions," the discussion turns on the possibility and probability of

an advent. This is followed, in the second chapter, by inquiries as to the ability of the New Testament writers rightly to apprehend and to report our Lord in his unique career and his especial teachings; their credibility as witnesses to certain alleged facts. Then comes a third chapter, devoted to a critical examination of the contents of their testimony to the advent.

The same order of inquiry is preserved in discussing the termination of the earthly career of our Lord. In the fourth chapter the probability of such a resurrection and ascension are considered. In the fifth chapter the witnesses and their means of knowing the facts to which they testify are passed in review. In the sixth chapter the testimony they give is carefully examined. And the two related facts, of such a beginning and such an ending of the earthly life of Jesus, are shown to carry with them the conviction to careful students that some such intermediate life was lived as that claimed by the New Testament writers.

If we can ascertain "how Jesus came and how he left us," then new emphasis is given to further questions concerning "who he was" and "what he did when he was with us." Then the birth, the life, the death, the resurrection will each demand the other, and together will make up the completed whole.

If the perusal of this little book shall be as helpful to the reader as its preparation has been to the author he will be abundantly rewarded for his study of the subject discussed.

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ADVENT AND ASCENSION.

HOW JESUS CAME TO US.

CHAPTER I.

Preliminary Questions.

Two gentlemen were conversing about that subject on which men will never cease to think and speak—the supernatural. It was near to the Christmas celebration. One of them said to the other, "This whole matter of the supernatural is very fascinating; but can we really know anything definite about it?" In reply his friend referred to what he called the leading fact of supernaturalism—the peculiar birth of Jesus Christ which so many were just about to celebrate. "But," said the first man, "there are immense difficulties in the way of the acceptance of the story of the birth of a human child who had no human father. The whole matter is so utterly unlike all we know of other human births as to be almost, if not altogether, incredible. I wish one could believe in Christianity without accepting the virgin birth." To which there was the quick reply that if the Child then born was simply and

only a human child there would be the gravest doubt. But if the one thus born was a demand alike of God's thought and of man's thought, of God's need and of man's need, then some such beginning of an earthly life would not only be credible, but the absence of it would be an incredible thing. "That may be so," said the other; "and yet I find it hard to believe in what is called 'the Incarnation.'" "Will you," was the instant reply, "consider carefully five things which I will put down in the form of questions? And when you have thought them through we will talk again of these things. The five questions are these:

"1. Has there been a widespread and conscious need of some such an incarnation of God in a person with a human body and mind and soul?

"2. Would such an incarnation as that described in the Gospels fitly introduce a life that should meet certain needs of God and of man; and, if so, what are those needs?

"3. Is there any other more probable way for such a being to come to us than through some such a birth as that claimed in the New Testament?

"4. Would such an incarnation, followed by such a life, make the whole matter of religion more distinct and impressive?

"5. Can we think of any better way, all things considered, for giving to the world satisfactory evidence of such an event than that furnished in the New Testament?"

Whether the other man consented to use this most

reasonable method of approaching the subject we need not ask; but we—writer and reader of these pages—may consider together not unprofitably these questions just named. For they are not forbidden. These inquiries are not irreverent. As men endowed with reason we are required to employ our faculties on these noble themes. And this method of approach is not to be considered as an *a priori* argument—though *a priori* argument in all investigation is not without a certain worth; these questions are to be asked simply to open up the problem and to show what is involved in the idea of an incarnation.

The word "incarnation" is used more especially of one event—the alleged virgin birth of our Lord. But that event is the initial one which gives its name also to a whole marvelous career. So that, while in this discussion we are to use the word mainly in its initial sense, there cannot but be a constant recurrence to the subsequent life which such a birth would forecast.

1. Has there been a widespread conviction of the need of some such an incarnation?

There has certainly been a widespread and ineffaceable belief in the supernatural. This has not been confined to men in the lower civilizations; foremost thinkers to-day form societies for psychical research. It is not the mark of high thinking to confine one's thought to the material world. Even science, which is defined to be "the study and classification of phenomena," is constantly overleaping its self-imposed bounds and striving to enter the domain of philosophy by asking

what there is—there is felt to be something—behind all phenomena. Pressed closely, nearly all scientists—how much more all philosophers—are getting to feel that the "something behind all phenomena" is a "Some One." The new drift is certainly in that direction. Mind is not content with things. It desires to know what is the thought that is over and above and in all things. The "something behind" is *super*natural; *above* nature. So thought the ancients, agreeing in this with the moderns. Egyptian thought had among those initiated into the priesthood many who held firmly to the supernatural, and its God was God alike of the natural and the supernatural. Greek and Roman thought pressed on over different paths to the same result. Hebrew thinking ran with greater depth and wider stream toward that same illimitable ocean of the supernatural.

For want of some great fact that shall govern all men's ideas of the supernatural there have been many sad mistakes. As with the natural, so with the supernatural, there have been tens of thousands of wrong theories. Who, on account of all these errors, believes the less in the natural, and why should any wise man believe the less in the supernatural because of human mistakes about this matter? We call them errors in the realm of the natural, and superstitions in the realm of the supernatural. And only Omniscience can know whether those in the one realm exceed those in the other; but no number of them can destroy the persistent belief in an external and natural world, and also in

an invisible and spiritual world. Now, if there can be assurance given to men by some one great fact in which the supernatural bursts through the natural in undoubted manifestation—some one great fact, like the Incarnation, which will show men the line along which the supernatural can be relieved on the one hand of the frivolous and on the other of the superstitious—and thus there can be a clear sanity in following that line, then the great demand will be perfectly met.

Let it be conceded that "God is the normal object of the mind's belief;" still the universal craving is gratified only in part. It is felt that the God manifested in nature ought to be further manifested in man. From the shaping and the working of man's mind we can get some idea of the divine mind. But the two ideas, that of man's likeness to God in order of faculty and that of the incarnation of God in a being possessed of a human body and a human soul, are widely different. The latter has been often surrounded with terrible misconceptions, and yet men have held to it persistently notwithstanding all. Those attempts may have been "blind and halt and lame," but who would know of blindness if there were no vision, or of sickness if there were no health? There would be no superstition if there were not somewhere the true religion; and the multitude of mistaken ideas about an incarnation of God in the long reaches of human history show, not that everything is false, but that somewhere there is a truth in this direction.

Reviewing the philosophic conceptions of the think-

ing world, Mr. S. Baring-Gould has insisted that "the belief in a Creator is" in all human thought "the first step that necessitates an incarnation." This was but the echo of the declaration of Plato, that God must come down from heaven in human form if men were to have certainty in religion. The concept of the more ancient faiths was that of a Restorer "who, while human, should also be more than human." In some loose sense one section of Eastern thought held that every man was an emanation—an idea which, though different, was in some ways akin to that of an incarnation. Zoroaster, soon after Moses, "predicted a Saviour incarnate," and, in the later legend of Greece, Prometheus is to be delivered from his chains. In Brahmanism God did not always dwell on high. He came down in earthly form to live and suffer for men. In the "Mahabharata," a poem more ancient than Buddhism, there is a series of divine "descents," so called, somewhat similar to incarnations. The Deity says, "When religion is in danger I come forth." Only this is to be noted, that these hints in the Indian religions have in them no gain except in philosophic theory. There is no real incarnation. There is never actual fact, never real moral personality. At most there is merely theoretical resemblance. There is a distinct hint; but practically the hint is neutralized by divergent beliefs. Always the idea was to free men not from sin, but from personal existence; for life was considered a curse. The coming One was to give death, not life. These premonitions show the hold of

the idea of incarnation, even in its mistaken forms, on the race.[1]

Now, there is just one direction in which a thoughtful man can look to find a real incarnation. He will find it not in the Roman idea, in which man becomes a god—which is not an incarnation at all. He will find it only in God becoming man, as in Christianity. In such an incarnation as it presents all rightful expectations culminate. It is here or nowhere. It is this or nothing, thus far on in human history. If this can be certified there will be a clew to the kind of supernaturalism which alone is credible; a test by which superstition can be detected and the genuinely supernatural in religion be assured. The credible will be along this line. The supernatural, then, for us will have a basis.

2. Would such an incarnation as that described in the Gospels be the fit introduction to a life that should meet especial needs of God and of man; and, if so, what needs?

Let us say, with all reverence, that God may need it for his own manifestation. Revealed partially in the constitution of human souls and in their physical environment, these methods are liable to the mistake which belongs to any partial disclosure. So much known may need to have more made known by way of correction. Alike God's transcendence and his

[1] Stalker in his *Life of Christ*, after reciting some of the heathen stories of God-born men from mortal mothers, and after showing how repugnant all such ideas were to men trained, as were the apostles, in Jewish ideas, insists that these things were "indications of a deep-seated sense in our common humanity of the need of an incarnation."

immanence may need a manifestation peculiar in kind and full in expression. The material universe and even the largest of all human souls may fail here. God may need in self-justification to do more than to manifest himself. He may need to become incarnate himself. And if he, then how much more may we need such an incarnation! He has revealed himself just enough to whet our appetite for more and peculiar revelation. We know just enough about him not only to wish to know more but to be in absolute need of knowing more. We are finite, yet with infinite cravings; sinful, yet with ideals of absolute perfection. If God may demand an incarnation in order not to be misunderstood, how much more may we in order not to misunderstand! There are things beyond which we need to know in order to do the right; things above our ken that would so help us if God would by his incarnation reveal himself to us. Even our finiteness and sinfulness are pleas for his compassion. It seems to be so needful to have some things settled once for all, and so settled that never could one doubt be raised about them. And so far as we can see the only settlement of them would be by a divine incarnation.

Take that truth of God as a God of love. How will you prove it? Can any man take all the facts for and against the proposition, and estimate them all properly, and then strike the balance and give the decision? He must needs be omniscient to do this. Some single fact not known to anyone save to God might change the verdict. Even when we take into the account the

things we think we know, are we quite sure we fully know them? Inclined by what he sees to-day to decide that God is love, a man may be obliged to suspend or even reverse his judgment to-morrow. His own moods have much to do with his decision. His position, his climate, his surroundings, his associates, his studies, his business, his recreations, all affect his conclusion. He may propose to decide the question by what he knows of the aspects of nature about him, but skies frown, as well as smile; and if there is not some one great overwhelming fact in proof of the divine love, he can come to no decision. Shutting out anything like the idea of incarnation, where could one find this needed proof?

A man stands on St. Elmo. Before him is the finest bay in all the world, the Bay of Naples. Directly across from him is Vesuvius, its thin veil of smoke rising gracefully from its summit. Beautiful white villages cling to its sides. The sunset hour is near. The air is full of that wonderful golden mist seen nowhere else on earth, a mist that conceals nothing but glorifies all things above, beneath, around. There is the sough in the low trees of the soft wind that hardly disturbs a leaf. The view is one of surpassing loveliness. Once seen it is the memory of a lifetime. The tender benediction of Heaven seems to rest on all things that meet the eye, and the man says that surely the Maker of all this is benignant; surely "God is love." But let this man visit again the same spot. Scarce twenty-four hours have gone, but how changed

is all! Instead of last night's glory, the heavens are ashen gray and are turning swiftly to blackness. The air is heavy with sulphurous vapors. The solid world reverberates with the thunder of the earthquake. That grand and beautiful Vesuvius of last night is sullen in its awful roar, and down its sides flow the streams of fiery lava. They reach those cities clinging yesterday so fondly to its sides. They sweep them out of existence in a moment; and their fleeing inhabitants—men, women, and children—before they can gain a place of safety, notwithstanding all their cries to Heaven, are caught in that horrible flood and perish miserably in their wild despair. What shall this man say now? Is God love, or is he hate?[1] If last night this man, standing amid the glories of that Italian sunset, was warranted in his conclusion that "God is love," what conclusion is he warranted in drawing to-night? Can he be blamed for his newer inference?

It is not easy in a world like this, with its abounding contradictions, to draw the inference that love rules; or, if one draws it in hours of delight, what inference remains for him in his hours of anguish? Look out where you will. Populous cities? Yes; and crowded cemeteries where the dead outnumber the living. Calm summers? Yes; and fierce, wild storms rising on the ocean, gathering new fury with every mile they travel, and then pouring themselves on some doomed bark crowded toward toothed rocks hungry for their

[1] "It looks as if there were an almighty power working out some far-off end of its own with serene disregard of suffering, expenditure, and waste entailed in the process."—*Maudsley.*

prey, at midnight, and none to save. Who shall gather all the facts to see whether love predominates, or hate? When we have gathered all the facts we know, and all which the whole human race has accumulated, there may be some other sad fact which no man has yet discovered, but which if taken into the estimate would turn disastrously the scale.[1] Not in this way, not by nature alone, not by any summing up of its facts or its laws, is it given man to know his God. No more is it possible for God, longing to reveal himself, in this way to make himself fully known. Man's needs and God's needs call for more. If there is not more, then God will inevitably be misunderstood by man. In man's best endeavors to judge of the divine attributes and perfections by these partial revelations about him he may draw honest conclusions that are utterly incorrect. His moods of sadness or of gladness may prevail to the warping of his judgment. No revelation were almost preferable to one so liable to be misinterpreted. There needs to be some additional revelation of the divine characteristics or we are worse than confused.

Now if there could be an actual incarnation of God himself, an incarnation of such surpassing glory that nothing cast into the opposite scale could ever outweigh it, the question would be settled. If the Incarnate One came to us on a mission of pure love, that fact would go far toward the solution. If God became

[1] Bishop Butler, reasoning indeed on another matter, incidentally remarks on "the infinitely absurd supposition that we men ever know all the facts of a case."

incarnate in divine self-denial and self-sacrifice, in self-suffering evidently far beyond the limits of all comprehension, and all this were done as an "offering for our sins" and to bring about an "eternal redemption" for us, then, before this highest possible proof, there would be triumphant vindication, and men would be compelled to say that here was a manifestation which showed, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that God is love. One would be justified in believing, notwithstanding all possible sorrows in this or in any other world, that here is a proof which outweighs all that can be alleged on the other side. If the darkness were a thousandfold darker this one fact would dispel it; for it shows that the God who gave the "Only Begotten" has himself taken all things into the account, and that he who sees all the shadows in his universe sees also that they do not overpower this sunshine. He knows his own perfection of love. Browning sings:

> "I say the acknowledgment of God in Christ,
> Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
> All questions in the world and out of it."

And again:

> "The Divine Instance of self-sacrifice
> That never ends and aye begins for man,
> So never miss I footing in the maze.
> No; I have light, nor fear the dark at all."

The need of God to reveal himself, and equally the need of man to receive such a revelation of the very God himself, is only partially met by sending to the

race inspired patriarch, prophet, and apostle. They, taught of God, could teach men; but teaching can never meet either the divine or the human craving for the coming of God himself. The divine illumination of a mere man and the incarnation of a God are widely different conceptions. Some such way of God's coming as that recorded in the Gospels and some such life as that lived by the Incarnate One described in Scripture story would alone meet the demand. That way of coming would fitly introduce that kind of life which needed to be lived among men, and thus the highest form of certainty would be furnished.[1]

3. Is there any other more probable way for such a being to come to us than by some such birth?

It is clear that no one—not even God—can come into our human race except in the way we all came into it—by a human birth. He must be "born of a

[1] There are various kinds of certainty. Mathematical certainty has been much praised. But setting aside the fact that geometry rests entirely on "axioms" which can never be logically proved, though necessarily taken as true, this is clear: that mathematical proof pertains only to mathematics, and is absolutely valueless morally since it has no voluntariness. There is no act of will when we see the demonstration of the forty-seventh proposition of Euclid, and the element of will is a necessity to moral belief and therefore to moral certainty. Thus moral belief is a higher exercise of mind and heart than mere assent to mathematical demonstration. And inductive certainty has also been greatly praised, especially by scientific men; but it has always one element of uncertainty. We can never be quite sure that all the facts are in on which to found the induction. Only Omniscience knows them all on any one subject. Some newly discovered fact in optics or acoustics, some newly applied principle, such as that of evolution, may be the one fact or principle that shall not only change but exactly reverse the world's verdict. The nearest approach to certainty must always be the moral certainty of an earnest and devout soul accepting the facts of a revealed religion and led into their spiritual application by the Spirit of God. It is John, the most spiritual of the New Testament writers, who, before the historic facts of the gospel, uses most frequently the words "We know."

woman." He must be not one like us but actually one of us; a partaker of our physical, mental, and moral nature. He must be not angelic in grade of being, but human; "flesh of our flesh, spirit of our spirit." He must begin as a child, born from a human mother. And yet he must be sinless. If sin were a necessity of our human nature, if it were essential to being a man to be a sinner, the objection to a holy birth anywhere in our humanity would be fatal. But humanity was sinless in Eden and is also sinless in heaven. And so it can be sinless in the Coming One. There can be no need of holding that his mother shall be sinless, and then that her mother shall be found sinless also. Simple humanity, in itself, is not sinful humanity. The Coming One can be like us in every respect save that of sinfulness as he comes into our race in the one only way—that of birth.

It was held among the people into whose nationality he would be most likely to be born that there was especial purity in the virgin life. It was held by them that through a virgin descended from a royal line such a one would come into the world. It might be expected that God, suiting his methods to the ideas of the time so that he might the better be understood, would have some regard for these ineffaceable beliefs of the nation foremost in its moral convictions and expectations. Virgin birth and royal descent were among these requirements, but there was equal need that the birth should be among men of lowly estate, on the plane where the toiling millions do their work.

The Coming One must, then, be born a human child, and grow up to the maturity of manhood, but he must see no decrepitude, and his work be done before age can write any wrinkle on his brow. Of virgin birth, of royal descent, yet reckoned among common people, he can span all social distinctions from prince to peasant, and, thus belonging to all classes, the word of his message will be for Jew and Gentile alike. His birth and life and death should be of one piece, each part illustrating the other and harmonizing with it, and the whole having its own wonderful uniqueness and completeness. What should such a person, so coming into our race, be expected to be and to do? He will be human, as we have seen; but none the less will he be divine. There will be what Dr. van Dyke so happily calls "the human life of God."[1] It will not be the impossible thing, the human become the divine; but the exact opposite, the divine become the human. How this can be we can no more understand than how God can be at all. We only know that it is not beyond Omnipotence. Whether this has been actually done we are to inquire in a subsequent chapter;[2] here and now the conditions which are involved in the problem are considered.

And we do not need to hold that God becoming man would thereby be so limited that we should have only a man's measure of God. If we must speak, in such a matter, of any limitation it is self-limitation that we mean. But is it not, if we must use these coarse

[1] *Gospel for an Age of Doubt*, chap. iv.

[2] See chap. ii.

material terms, an extension rather than a limitation? When the great tide of the ocean comes in, its waters do not hold themselves back to the coast lines as set down in our geographies. They run up extending themselves into every bay and inlet, following the configuration of the land, suiting themselves to every varying need that those waters can supply. If we must use some physical term let us talk of God as *extending* his love and grace in an incarnation so as to suit his divinity to our humanity. But why use at all these coarser mechanical terms of limitation and expansion? God is a Spirit, and the incarnation that meets our needs will be that of an Almighty One becoming man, not of a finite man becoming God. Let words suited only to material relations be discarded. God is able to become incarnate.[1]

4. Would such an incarnation, followed by such a life, make the whole matter of religion more distinct and impressive?

The idea of God has been, up to a certain point, wonderfully potent in human history and in individual experience. Mr. Kidd in his *Social Evolution* has fitly rebuked those who would construct a sociology by forgetting the force of moral ideas in the past and by failing to take them into account in estimating the future. Theism, even aside from the facts of Christianity, has had a large mission. It furnishes an intel-

[1] Balfour, speaking of those who would use *exclusively* the inductive method and so refuse all other forms of proof, says: "We should not be surprised nor embarrassed if the unique mystery of the Christian faith refuses to yield itself to the inductive treatment."

lectual satisfaction to the mind inquiring as to the origin of the universe about us and within us. It is the topstone of an intellectual pyramid that stands foursquare. Rooted in the mind, among its primary convictions as some claim, a preparation in the very constitution of our human nature for the idea, from whatever source that idea comes to us, this conviction is so far a subjective idea. It may be strengthened by our careful reasonings, but even then it is from within us, our own idea. And this fact, that it is a subjective idea in its beginning and is fortified by our own reasonings, also subjective, shows its limitations. It can go just so far. There it stops and waits for something external, something specially objective; something to be seen, touched, manifested in space and time. The inward impression needs outward helpfulness. This is shown by the vast number of things men have devised to make the idea of God more distinct and potent. The appeal has been to the eye and ear. Hence images of the gods, sacred relics, and voices, and omens; holy places and holy days; rituals of worship with their appliances for expression and impression. Men have sought to invigorate and sustain the subjective idea by the use of objective things. What is needed is some vast demonstration outside our own consciousness of our states of inward feeling and conviction. Agreeing therewith, at the same time, it must go vastly further. Is there anything else that can do this so well as an incarnation of God—the very God himself? Theism can find a limited revelation of God

in all things, and, indeed, in all souls; but Christianity, with its incarnation, goes on very far beyond what material things, and even the human soul of Jesus himself, could exhibit. One great unparalleled setting forth of God himself seen as God—not filling out the powers of a man, but "becoming" man for us—that would be the perfect meeting of all requirement. That would take the things of religion out of all our human dimness into the eternal sunlight. And if we can hear a Christ say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," that suffices for evermore. There can be no want that a true incarnation will not meet and satisfy.

Not the restoration of God to man only, but equally the restoration of man to God, will come through such an incarnation. Sin is distance. Sinners are wanderers. If former sin can be forgiven, if present sin can be put away, if future eternal life can be secured, if we can be reinstated in our lost relation, if these whole matters of the soul's restoration can be procured for us and wrought in us through some great revelation brought home to the world in historic authenticity, and brought home also to each soul in a spiritual realization, and if this can be done by an incarnation of God himself, then the old dimness will be replaced by clearest vision, the old distance by a new and delightful nearness. God will be no more abstract and vague. He will be a "God nigh at hand." And the incarnation will bring God so near that we can speak, alike in the language of the heart and the

head, of one who is "Immanuel, God with us," and the heart of God and the heart of man can be made one again.

Astronomers have been stationed far apart on the earth's surface to observe a coming eclipse. Each man, though at great distance from any other man, points his tube directly at the same sun. In that one act their separation becomes union. They are one in looking up to the great source of solar radiance. Their common thought and interest centers in that sun. And here, in the realm of religion, if there is the one great spectacle of the Only Begotten assuming manhood that in the Incarnation he may meet the deepest needs alike of God's justice and love and of man's weakness and sin, and if on him, as he enters upon a career to be pursued along the way of a marvelous life, of an atoning death, and of a culminating resurrection, God's gaze can be fixed in holy approval, and if the same fact can also catch and hold the gaze of man—man as a race and each man as an individual—then God and man, both looking with sympathetic intentness and appreciative love on the same divine Son, become one again. The heart of God and the heart of man can apprehend each other in the Incarnation.

5. Can we think of any better way, all things considered, for giving to the world satisfactory evidence of the Incarnation than that furnished in the New Testament?

Notice that the method is in consonance with the demands of that age, and also that it has in view the men

of all the succeeding centuries. Jesus is not represented as writing any one line of his own teachings. Nor should such an omission on his part surprise us. It was the method of his time that the disciples of a great teacher should first of all bear oral witness to his words and deeds. Hence the fitness, in the earliest years of the new faith, of what has been called the "oral gospel," the verbal proclamation of the Lord's teachings. But the time would come when, for the sake of establishing the gospel and transmitting it to men the world around and the centuries through, there must be authentic documents. Plainly there should be, first of all, not the details, but the promulgation of the general principles of this gospel by some one of comprehensive grasp who could see the relation of part to part, and of all the parts to the great whole. It was needful that the divine conception of the events should precede the human records of them. Something like our Epistles, written by one able to take a comprehensive view of the new faith, was the primal need. No one of the twelve, at the outset certainly, was the man for this work. They were the best possible men to fill in the details in subsequent sketches, such as our Gospels, provided always that some master mind should first disclose the purpose, the meaning, the pantology of the whole movement. The main thing, of course, about the new gospel was the divine conception of its character and its scope. There was need of a master mind to grasp the ideas that were fundamental and to set them forth to the world. Such

a man was Paul, whose earlier Epistles antedate the Gospels not only in the order of intellectual conception but in order of composition.[1] The Gospels simply fill in the details of the broader thought of the earlier Epistles. In order of event, of course, the facts recorded in the Gospels preceded the Epistles; but, on the other hand, the earliest Epistles, not only in date of composition but in the order in which a believer in the earliest Christian centuries would receive them, which is the true spiritual order, would come first. An inquirer would first want to know that God in Jesus Christ had offered salvation to men. Details at first were not needed—are not the first thing needed in any age, as the gospel comes to an inquirer. Paul saw Christianity as a whole. The nearest thing to him was Christ's resurrection.[2] But such a resurrection presupposes some such a death, and this, in turn, some such a life; and this presupposes some such an incarnation. And this wholeness of the gospel as a single broad conception took the eye and supplied the spiritual need of the thousands of converts; as is manifest in the constant references made in the Epistles to the things these converts are said already

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[1] The first group of Paul's Epistles (Thessalonians and Romans) are assigned to about A. D. 53-55; while Mark's Gospel, antedating by several years the other Gospels, is now generally assigned to about A. D. 65. Paul's second group of Epistles (Galatians and Corinthians) is assigned to about A. D. 54-58. Both groups precede the Gospels.

[2] "Paul was in a better position to estimate their general meaning than those whose minds were occupied with the details. For him these facts were lost in the one fact of Christ's death as the manifestation of a spiritual principle." "He saw the master-meaning of Christ's whole work."—*Evolution of Religion*, E. C. Caird in Gifford Lectures, pp. 194, 195.

to believe. This is the way Christianity comes to genuine converts in every age. It is by the broad, strong apprehension, in some fair degree, of the Christian scheme as a scheme that men at the outset come to believe. Afterward men ask about the details in Christ's life. Nobody directs an inquirer in any age to the details given by Luke and Matthew of the virgin birth. The logical and moral order chosen by the New Testament is the Epistle, putting the outline facts in doctrinal form, and subsequently comes the detail of separate facts in the Gospels. There are those who think that, if they must make their choice for their knowledge of Christianity, they would rather surrender the Gospels than the Epistles. Happily we need surrender neither.

It is probable, also, that the Epistles had wider publication in the first century than the Gospels, and it is to be regarded as an especial plan of God that, subsequently, Gospels and Epistles came to be parallel in their composition and their circulation; the *later* Epistles of Paul and Peter and James interpreting the Gospels under divine guidance. And the Gospels which give us in narrative form the circumstances of the virgin birth are just the two which should do it, and the two that omit it are the very two in which such details would awaken suspicion. John sees the Lord as the being of dateless ages; the eternal Son who in his earthly career just touched, as it were incidentally, these mortal shores. And Mark for just the opposite reason, that he wrote rapidly for the

Roman world, presenting Jesus as Master—the form that would best take and hold its attention—has no need to give the details of the virgin birth. The two evangelists give it who should. Luke's two chapters are pure and chaste and delicate, showing traces of the very words in which the virgin mother would confide to him the holy secret. Luke does not philosophize. He lays down no doctrine. That had been done by Paul, who had said that Jesus "was born of a woman," and who claims that this Jesus was "God manifested in the flesh."

It is obvious, then, that when one would get "back to Christ"—the popular phrase of many—he must do it by the way of Paul, to whom we are indebted for our earliest documentary evidence of Christ's existence. The wisdom that planned this peculiar order and style of the New Testament writings is manifest. The wide difference between Paul's four earliest Epistles, in which he prepares the way for the documentary evidence, and his later Epistles, which are explanatory and hortatory, is very remarkable. The play and interplay of Epistle and Gospel and Acts and Apocalypse are all a steadily accumulating series of proofs that have in mind not only the primitive but the more advanced ages of Christianity. Writing for their more immediate times, as do all Scripture writers, these men in their Epistles and Gospels, whether they knew it or not, were serving as well the ages to come.

And so the Infinite Wisdom that devised the Incarnation did not leave the testimony that was to establish

the fact to any accidental circumstances, but furnished the world, in a way far better than any other that we can conceive, with the most careful methods possible of preserving the evidence of the most wonderful of all wonderful events

CHAPTER II.

The Witnesses to the Incarnation.

In the previous chapter we have seen the world-wide expectation of and demand for an incarnation; the manifest need of it, also, if God would be understood and man was to understand him; the positive requirement of it if religion, ceasing to be a mere opinion, was to become a profound and influential conviction; the necessity of it if the best subjective aspiration, through a corresponding objective manifestation, was to have the requisite vigor, and thus a potent inspiration be gained toward securing the highest ideal of living. Certain objections considered were seen to be without special force, and thus the way was prepared for our present inquiry concerning the witnesses to the Incarnation.[1] The contents of their testimony are to be subsequently considered. The inquiry now is about the witnesses and their means of knowing that to which they testify.

The witnesses are (1) God himself; (2) Jesus

[1] If a great moral need in human souls is met by a supernatural fact, then there is also the need of competent witnesses to the fact; otherwise the fact is useless to the world. Men can testify not to a miracle as a miracle, but only to a fact as a fact. That the fact amounts to a miracle is only an inference from the fact. Its supernaturalness has nothing to do with the proof of the fact itself. It must be judged by the laws of evidence; and the character, the means of knowledge, the the intellectual and, above all, the moral worth of the witnesses are matters to be duly estimated.

Christ, his Son, before and after his advent; (3) the apostles who had kept company with the Lord Jesus Christ and had listened to his own testimony and to that of those who knew the "holy secret" of his birth and the corresponding manner of his life; and, finally, (4) the whole company of spiritual believers through the Christian centuries who have felt the inward power of the gospel facts, involving, as they do, the supernatural birth of the Lord.

1. God himself has borne witness through men.

It is told of a man fresh from European civilization that he once attempted to explain the mechanism of his watch to an untutored native just out of an African jungle. It was no easy thing to do. He could not speak of mainspring and escapement, of hands and of dial plate. All that was an unknown tongue to his hearer. He did the best in his power, and he believed that the man gained a fair idea of the watch, but he confessed himself not a little hampered and hindered by the ignorance of the man on the Congo. We may conceive that in some similar way God was hindered and hampered when he would give to man the desired testimony of his Son in the days before the Incarnation. He must needs use men if he would add direct testimony to the manifestations of himself that he had always been affording to the human race in the physical world. He would now speak, use human language, employ men. A certain degree of imperfection through the using of these men as his instruments must be theoretically conceded. It is true, indeed, that

for those who regard certain chosen men as divinely inspired, the imperfection is reduced to a minimum. It even disappears. But in a progressive revelation in which, with advancing clearness, certain fundamental ideas are presented there still remain the rudeness of former ages, the imperfect conceptions of the earlier centuries. There is, however, the widest difference between directly erroneous statement and statement that, correct as far as it goes, is imperfect only because it fails to give the full-orbed truth. Nor need we think of this as limitation, but the rather as adaptation; just as the incoming tide of the ocean adapts itself to every inlet of the varying shore. If the Coming One could, being God, become man, then there could be incontestable testimony to the fact that God speaks to men. The Living Word possible, the written word would be a possibility in attestation of the Christ who was to come in due time. To deny that God could infallibly communicate his will through inspired men is to deny God himself. The more serious thing is to get himself understood when God will speak, will use our human language in giving us his testimony. But, whether understood or not, this is sure: he has *spoken* on this matter of the Incarnation. "The Father himself hath borne witness."[1] "This is the witness of God."[2] "God at sundry times and in divers manners hath spoken."[3] He, as we should expect, is the chief witness. He has not only spoken to man but spoken by man; giving in this way the highest forms of proof which he can

[1] John v, 37. [2] 1 John v, 9. [3] Heb. i, 1, 2.

give or man can receive. Some of these divine testimonies were given before Christ came. God took those "sundry times" at periods when the world needed especial testimony. He took, also, those "divers manners," sometimes by using physical miracle, which contained always in itself that elemental teaching best suited to the emergencies of an age; sometimes by establishing religious rites, meaningless apart from their prophetic aspect but overflowing with significance as predictions of an incarnation; sometimes by his prophets, he ingrafting upon their natural forecast a divine foresight; sometimes by poets, he using their human genius at its highest and bestowing glimpses of a more than human inspiration. He took historians, men of industry, of great research in the literatures of the world, skilled in judging of the future by the past, and upon their natural judgment he superinduced such divine judgment of human affairs that their writings abound in glimpses of a Coming One who should be Prophet and Priest and King and Saviour. He took patriots, whose natural longings and aspirations for the welfare of their people were intense, and he enlarged, purified, directed, and inspired all their desires and their hopes, and gave them grand vision of a Deliverer for the whole race from the bondage of sin. In short, we may say that there seems to be nothing usable that God did not use in bearing testimony to the coming advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a word occurring with notable frequency

on the pages of the New Testament. It is the word "witness." It is used with its corresponding word, "testimony," more than a hundred times. Every New Testament writer, without exception, employs it. John, not content with using it here and there, reiterates it so that it has been called "the key word" to his writings. The writer of the Acts records the fact of its constant use in the apostolic addresses. All this abundant employment of the word shows the great carefulness, not only of apostles and of early Christians, but of God himself, who inspired their teaching and the record of it, to put before the world the idea that the new religion was built on the basis of exact historical facts susceptible of proof. There was to be light enough for any man who had the fair mind, the upright intent, and whose moral vision had been kept clear enough to see what evidence God himself had furnished to the world. The proof was not to be mathematical, for this realm is higher than mathematics. Nor was it to be scientific, for science, as we now use that term, was unborn; and in any age only a few foremost men can use its methods, while this religion was to offer its proof to all. Those addressed were to be considered not as scientific or nonscientific, but as men—men open to the kind of proof God had to offer. It was to be intellectual and moral proof in perfect combination—the strongest kind of proof that it is possible to submit to the consideration of mankind. Head and heart—neither alone but each as helping the other—were to have their united satisfaction, and so

there was to be a certainty of conviction that can be secured by no other kind of proof.

This testimony comes to us as literature,[1] but there is always a divine peculiarity in it. To "study it simply as literature," as one studies literature in Shakespeare, is to study the frame of the picture and to overlook the picture itself. It is "the more than literature in it" that gives it its unique character. Its literary form is simply an incidental help in the interpretation of "God's witness" herein given to men. No doubt there were "vague longings in the hearts of the Hebrew bards and prophets;" but to see these only is to miss the most remarkable thing about their writings; is to forget that Scripture came not in the old time by the will of men, but "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."[2] This latter fact must always be the aspect more wonderful, more important, and so more to be noted than any merely literary form. No doubt it is true, as has been alleged, "that a national Messiah who should be a political deliverer was the expectation of the Jews, and so was a kind of natural as well as national prophecy in all the prophetic writings of the Hebrews." But this is the very thing that God, who uses all that can be used, has seized

[1] "A revelation attended by prophecies and miracles is a conceivable proposition, and might teach us that which otherwise we could not know."—*Articles of Negative Creed*, quoted from *Contemporary Review*.

[2] 2 Pet. i, 21. It is Balfour's suggestive comment "that there must be some means of marking off those examples of its operation—that of inspiration—which rightfully command our full intellectual allegiance from those which are no more than evidences of an *influence toward the truth*, working out its purpose slowly through the ages."—*The Foundations of Belief*, p. 34.

upon and broadened out and lifted up, until patriotic feeling could take in the more spiritual conception. To stop back with this "merely natural prophecy of Hebrew bards" is to stop back at the alphabet of a language and to overlook its use in communicating thought. No doubt, as some assert, "these men saw first of all the nearest things in the national life," but they saw more and more important things. These nearest things served, in God's design, as suggestions of farthest things. They were the "sight on the rifle" along which the marksman looks when aiming at the distant object. Each national deliverance possesses a chief interest to us because of the onward glance of the prophet's eye to the great Deliverer. Each "nearer thing to them" we may look upon for a moment because, under "the law of prophetic suggestion," it helps us to interpret the thing nearer to us and more important to us—its relation to the coming of our Lord and to what he should be and do for the wide world of mankind. Sometimes, as in the call of Moses at the burning bush,[1] as in the call of Isaiah at the temple service,[2] as in that of Samuel in the house of the Lord,[3] there was an audible voice. Sometimes God came by a dream of the night[4] and sometimes by a vision of the day.[5] Sometimes the prophet is momentarily overpowered; but for the most part he is perfectly conscious. "The spirits of the prophets were subject to the prophets."[6] Their God was not the God of confu-

[1] Exod. iii, 2. [2] Isa. vi, 8. [3] 1 Sam. iii, 4.
[4] Jer. i, 4. [5] Ezek. i, 3. [6] 1 Cor. xiv, 29–33.

sion. The heathen prophets gave themselves up to an insane frenzy and exhibited bodily contortions as proof that their god spoke through them. But a special sanity marked the true prophets. Their natural faculties were elevated, purified, strengthened, and inspired so that there was divine meaning in human speech. They were as far as possible from "amanuenses of the Holy Spirit," but sometimes their words had more meaning and further application than they knew. There were, as we learn from the New Testament, constant prophetic glances that even we, in our sharper light, could not have seen but for the Messianic meanings put upon their words by our Lord and his apostles. In a landscape, we may stand directly in front of a vast range of hills and see the height of each and the valleys between them. That is the view of the historian. Or we may go round to the end of the range, and we see now not a single valley, but only hill melting into hill, their summits only visible, and appearing often as one mountain. That is the manner of prophecy. One prophet sees a near-by thing in the national life. It suggests some event in the incarnate life of the Coming One. Another prophet is led to see the nearer thing in Israel, and the event connects itself, to his prophetic view, in character, though not in time, with the Bethlehem birth. It is some feature of the Incarnation—the becoming a man. It is always some act done or suffering endured by one coming into the race by the gateway of birth. He is never, as in the heathen myths, a full-grown man, a demigod, thrust in upon

the race. He is always one with us because one of us.

It has been alleged that we are given in prophecy an "ideal sketch," "the general picture of a noble character who is sometimes a noble sufferer and a righteous servant of the Lord." And some would reduce all the prophecies of Christ to these "ideal pictures," thus making them to be fulfilled more or less perfectly by all who are good men. But to stop with these "ideal pictures," even if their existence be granted, is to content one's self with remaining outside the temple when one may enter and behold its larger glory. It is to invert the telescope and so minimize the objects to which it is directed. It is to forget the definiteness that names the place of our Lord's birth, that predicts incident after incident in his life as afterward recorded in the New Testament. It is to forget that the New Testament declares, of some of these incidents, that "this was done that the scripture might be fulfilled which the prophet spake." The virgin birth was foretold, as well as the Calvary death, and so many incidents between the two were disclosed that some have called Isaiah "our fifth evangelist."

And historians as well as prophets have the vital eye and the spiritual vision. Taught to predict the future by their knowledge of what had brought blessing or cursing in the past, recording occasions when God intervened for his people, their wisdom came to have a kind of natural insight—if you will, a naturally prophetic element—in it. They saw how events had a

certain trend. Surely God, using all means, would not fail to use such men, giving to them the "divine glance." He caused them to see the Messiah's day. The birth and life and death of "the One sent of God" were the great things in which all history was seen to culminate. And these historians recorded the divine institution of religious rites, meaningless apart from an incarnation, but surcharged with the utmost significance when regarded as prophetic of the Christ to come. True, the heathen religions had their sacred rites, and while many of them were licentious, degrading, and even horrible, some few of them, among the better class of those religions, attained to some general moral significance. Sometimes there was beauty amid deformity; nature-myths expressed certain facts in the processes of the seasons, certain facts of human life and death; but those rites did not center in a person. They were suggested by sun, moon, and stars, by the storm and the sea. They were not prophetic. They sprang from no writing of a divine thought. They had in view no divine incarnation. In exact contrast to all this, each Hebrew rite looked on to a definite fact: the birth, the life, the death, the resurrection, and the reign of the Coming One. They testified to him as holy, harmless, undefiled; coming into our race as the Lamb of God for our sacrifice, as the Lord for our obedience, the Teacher to interpret for us the ancient mysteries and to show us how they all center in himself. Every rite was prophetic of something about the Christ to come.

Very instructive was the development of the original promise. Some see in that primal promise a mere hint, to be followed by stronger hints in the developed idea. It reads, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."[1] But others see a vast, strong, unmistakable outline in this primitive promise. It is "the protevangelium," or First Gospel. The whole statue is in the marble, and by degrees the figure shall become more and more shapely under the hand of the divine artist. Each new blow shall bring out something distinctive in form or feature. The whole idea was given, so some claim, at the outset. It is only the detail, and not the original idea, that is progressive. But this at least is certain, that the idea is that of *birth*. The *seed* of the woman is to bruise the serpent's head, though it shall bruise his heel. No full-grown man is to be thrust into the race. The Coming One comes to the cradle and grows up to his maturity and does his work of reversing the curse.

Then comes in due order the filling in of the grand outlines of the picture. Shem's children—it is birth and childhood again—are "blessed by the Lord God of Shem."[2] Another feature comes out in the picture in the promise to Abraham and his seed—again it is birth; this time in a definite family.[3] And we learn from our Lord's interpretation of the Abrahamic promise that the main reference was to spiritual bless-

[1] Gen. iii, 15. [2] Gen. ix, 26. [3] Gen. xii, 3.

ing, and the main blessing was in connection with the coming Christ: He "rejoiced to see my day . . . and was glad."[1] So, too, the Shiloh prediction emphasizes *birth* followed by the subsequent success of Christ as the "one sent of God."[2] Moses's words about a "Prophet" show another distinct feature in the grand portrait.[3] "He [Moses] wrote of me," said our Lord. The thought is again of *birth* and of growth to manhood, when "God's words should be put in his mouth." For it is not the prediction of a long line of prophets—a general consensus of men speaking for God—but of a specific person "among his brethren." There were also significant theophanies, or "God-manifestations." These were the "yesterdays" of that Christ who is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."[4] He is the "Angel of the Lord" addressed as Jehovah on various occasions. He is the "captain of the Lord's host" to Joshua.[5] In David's day he is the unfailing seed of David, and the unconditional promise of a perpetual King to Israel is fulfilled only as Christ, the spiritual King, takes up and broadens out the prediction.[6] And here again it is "the seed;" the Christ comes by the way of *birth*. Then follow "the prophets" whose writings we have. The divine artist constantly is bringing out additional features of the Lord. His *birth* as a "Son" is made prominent. He is, in the grandest promises, of the royal "seed of David"—always the *birth* and the *family*. The Mes-

[1] John viii, 56. [2] Gen. xlix, 10. [3] Deut. xviii, 18.
[4] Heb. xiii, 8. [5] Josh. v, 14. [6] 2 Sam. xxii, 51.

sianic line is the unfailing conception of all the prophets: "To him give all the prophets witness."[1] Presently they name the place of his birth. Presently they disclose his humble surroundings and yet his regal position. There are hints of the time and circumstances which can afterward be interpreted only as references to the manger birth. When one carefully studies all these utterances he is delighted not only with their fullness but with their reserve. For prophecy is not history written beforehand; it is the happy suggestion that afterward is seen to have had such admirable fitness as the prediction of historic fact.

2. There is also the testimony of Jesus Christ to himself.

He was to be *"the* Prophet."[2] It would be strange if he had not been his own witness in this matter. We are told that the "Spirit of *Christ"* was in the old prophets. They are said to have "searched diligently what the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify."[3] The words are not those elsewhere used of the words of the apostles, who are said to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. And this inspiration of the "Spirit of *Christ"* as the Spirit of prophecy is what we should naturally expect. When our Lord was on earth he turned the attention of a company of disciples to prophecies "concerning himself."[4] He looked backward as well as forward; to the Scripture already

[1] Acts x, 43. "The doctrine of a personal Messiah," says Dr. Felix Adler, "is the purple thread which runs through the writings of all our prophets."

[2] Deut. xviii, 15. [3] 1 Pet. i, 11. [4] Luke xxiv, 27.

written and to the Scripture to come. The prophetic Christ is as much a reality as the historic Christ. "He was"—in the old prophetic days—"*in the world,* and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not."[1] In those grand "yesterdays"[2] of his former existence he was giving testimony. He was "the faithful Witness" whenever a prophet spoke of the coming of the Messiah.[3] He was not silent in those ages when things were not as yet ripe for his appearance "in the flesh." His testimony to himself was but imperfectly understood by the prophets. They are represented as studying out with great care and with indifferent success what the "Spirit of *Christ* which was in them did signify." Their own thought and experience were not the measure of their own revelation. Christ's thought was broader than their thought. They spoke better than they knew because *Christ* spoke in them. So that we may claim every prediction about incarnation as not alone that of David, Isaiah, and the rest of the prophets, but as the testimony of Christ himself. He is not to be thought of as nonexistent or as noncommunicative before his advent, but as uttering himself continually through "all the prophets."

When he came into our human nature and stood among us, there were obvious reasons why he could not publicly speak of the lesser incidents connected with his humble birth. It was clear to the Jews that he did not start as a full-grown man. He had entered the race by the one gateway for all men. He had been

[1] John i, 10. [2] Heb. xiii, 8. [3] Rev. i, 5.

born of a human mother. What need of his asserting this fact? At that time no one denied it. Incidentally, indeed, he said, "To this end was I *born*."[1] And his repeated declarations about his previous celestial existence, about his coming from his native heaven and his speedy return thereto, his words about himself as sent by the Father, and about his departure to Him that sent him—all these are explicit testimony. The details of his marvelous birth were to be given presently, with other important events, when "he should be crucified," and the "Holy Spirit should guide" his followers, called to write our Gospels, "into all truth."[2] These details come fitly, and from the very evangelists whose object in writing would lead them to speak, after due knowledge, about the virgin birth. They knew what the claims of an incarnation involved, and their words of definiteness were spoken in no hesitating way.

3. The testimony of the disciples of Jesus.

When the time came for an incarnation of God in man the important thing, next to the Incarnation itself, was to secure such credible witnesses of the facts that every fair-minded man studying their testimony should be sure that such an incarnation had actually occurred. The mission of the Twelve was unique. Of varying temperament, belonging neither to the densely ignorant nor to the rabbinically learned, but of the great middle class of intelligent Hebrews, who would be the best observers and so make the best witnesses of

[1] John xviii, 37. [2] John xvi, 13.

the smaller matters of fact, these men had their three years of careful training. But we can readily see that this tendency and ability to note and testify to details in Christ's wonderful career would render them likely, at the outset, to fail even in the selection of details for their story, because of their lack of that comprehensive grasp of the broad meaning of Christ's coming and work, and of the fundamental ideas of the new religion. Exactly adapted for the thing they were to do, the best possible class of witnesses to single and separate facts, their especial preparation for that specific work was, to say the least, no help toward the other; some would even say that their knowledge of detail was a hindrance to their comprehension. In a machine shop a mechanic may have wrought so long at making certain parts of a complicated engine as to be perfect at that one thing; and yet he might not, until after some observation and practice, be able to set up the parts he had made into one completed machine ready to do its work.

There was a need which no devotion of Peter and James and John could supply. There was needed some one mind that could grasp the whole as a whole; could see the radical ideas of the system and formulate its underlying doctrines, and who could also condescend to those men of low estate of whom not all, indeed, but a considerable number of the earliest believers must be composed. Such a man was provided in Paul, foremost man of the new dispensation as Moses had been of the old. Converted early in the century, he had retired to Arabia and employed three years in examin-

ing the facts and in adjusting his head to his heart. He foresaw that the new religion must be one of authentic document, and the earliest books of the New Testament were from his pen. The subsequently written Gospels were merely the filling in, by the record of the specific acts of Jesus of Nazareth, of the great divine thought—a thought more fully grasped by Paul than by any other apostle. The one great fact, as he saw it, comprehending all other detailed facts, was that the Christ had come by whom sinners could be forgiven, regenerated, and saved. It was the gospel as a whole that he grasped, and to which he bore witness as one who had last of all seen the risen Christ—a resurrection that carried with it the previous birth and life and death. Years went by before the books that we call the Gospels were written, but Paul had sent out his Epistles with their amazing grasp of mingled fact and doctrine and precept.

"Back to Christ" is one of our phrases in recent theological literature. True, some, like Tolstoi, have used the phrase to carry us back past all the Epistles, and even past all the other utterances of Jesus, to his Sermon on the Mount. They would intimate that the "individuality of the writer" comes out especially in the Epistles. Yet it is difficult to see why there is larger room for this element in the one class of writings than in the other. John is a writer both of Epistle and Gospel, and Peter—if it be granted that he is behind Mark in the Gospel that goes under the name of the latter—is, equally, a writer in both classes of docu-

ments, and the charges of "undue personality" and "educational limitation" are not justly urged against the one more than against the other, while for carefulness and mastery of principles the writer of the earlier Epistles stands out preeminently. "Personal equation" is the happy fact in both Epistle and Gospel, so far as the definite aim of each writer is concerned. Each Epistle and none the less each Gospel, is written by a man who had a definite purpose in writing. The phrase "back to Christ" is, then, to be retained, notwithstanding some unfortunate perversions of it. To "go back to Christ" is to go back to Paul, our earliest New Testament writer. The Epistles to the Thessalonians, to the Galatians, to the Corinthians, and to the Romans, in chronological order, preceded the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These Epistles do not have the biographical form of the evangelical narratives, but they show how the early preachers preached before the Gospels were written, and how the early converts took up the great themes of the new religion as these met the minds and hearts of men. It is surprising to find how much of this Gospel material Paul assumes as known and names as vital, in these earliest Christian writings which were composed expressly for believers. Of course there is little detail, but the one great fact of Jesus Christ as an Incarnation of God is always his dominating fact. In the Epistles to the Thessalonians, the earliest of his writings, Paul, who had been trained to the strictest monotheism, puts Christ's name close to that of God, giving them equal

and joint authority. "God our Father" and "our Lord Jesus Christ" are named side by side in the opening verses, and are named again, jointly, in the middle of the First Epistle and at its end.[1] The same construction occurs repeatedly in the Second Epistle, which at its close omits the name of God, saying, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." The Epistles abound in references to the great facts of the gospel—the coming, the death, the resurrection, and the second advent of Jesus Christ. And we have Christ named with Jehovah. In three of these books we have his co-ordination with the Father.[2] He is God over all.[3] He is the author of creation.[4] He is God's own Son incarnate.[5] He came from heaven.[6] He disclosed Godhead in humanity.[7] In his strong book on the *Incarnation of the Son of God* Gore says, after citing the facts above named: "Thus in order of time Christ is [in these Epistles] first divine, afterward human; but in order of his self-disclosure, first human, then divine. He showed his divinity through his humanity. He appeared as man; afterward through the evidences of his manhood men came to believe in his Godhead. In part this belief was due to his miracles of power, in part to the spirit of holiness which gave his miracles a moral character and impressiveness; at the last resort, it was to his resurrection. He was shown to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead."[8]

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[1] 1 Thess. i, 1–10; iii, 13; v, 23.
[2] Rom. i, 7; 1 Cor. i, 3; 2 Cor. xiii, 14.
[3] Rom. ix, 5.
[4] 1 Cor. viii, 6.
[5] Rom. viii, 3; Gal. iv, 4.
[6] 1 Cor. xv, 47.
[7] Rom. i, 3.
[8] *Incarnation*, Gore, p. 65.

The Christ of the Epistles is the Christ of the Gospels. In the Epistles we get back to the thought of God in sending his son. In Paul's writings "we have," to use his own words, "the mind of Christ." It is true that afterward the facts are filled out with more fullness of detail in the Gospels, but the groundwork of this great divine thought is shown us through the Epistles. For, here as elsewhere, the thought back of the deeds and words is the main thing. It is what a man really is that best interprets what he says and does. If you can discover the peculiar "mind in the man," then you know him and how to take what he says. In these earlier Pauline Epistles the primal concepts and great substantial verities of Christianity are presented less in the form of records and more in the wholeness of the thought that lies behind them. We may consider, also, that we have in these earlier Epistles an inspired estimate as to the meaning of the detailed facts which, though not then written out in our Gospels, were held in the memory of the early disciples and used by the apostolic preachers as they wrote and spoke. For what Christ was and what he did obviously were matters more important to that age, and indeed to any age, than to know simply what he said. Plainly, any true interpretation of his words must largely depend on what he himself was.[1] Little

[1] "The founding of the kingdom of God was finally accomplished not by Christ's teaching as such, but by his personal devotion to his life-work, by his death and his resurrection. There must be more than teaching; there must be work and deed. Does his teaching thereby sink down to a mere introduction to the New Testament revelation? It must be said that, little as the teaching in itself apart from the conclusion of

detail was needed at the outset of the preaching. Things at first were not, as Luke says, "set in order." Not every intelligent disciple could know all the words and deeds to be afterward recorded in the carefully collated Gospels which were to be among the authentic documents of the new religion. Some single incidents in Matthew and John bear marks of having been ascertained, not at the outset, but only by comparison of evidence made at a time subsequent to their occurrence. To wait for the whole of the circumstances to be written out would have been to stop the early missionary tours which were of such inestimable worth in the great cause of the Master.

To-day let some man who knows very little about his Bible become aware, through great trouble or through the inward conviction wrought by God's Holy Spirit, of his spiritual need. What will you say to him? Will you begin with him on the first page of the Gospels? Will you take some circumstance, of value indeed, but not especially needful for his notice at that particular time? Not at all. You take the great facts of Christ's coming and dying and rising for man's salvation. You show him that Christ as Saviour and Lord exactly meets those needs that are greatest to him in that hour. Just at that point thousands have been converted to God. They are in no need of know-

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his life could have called into existence the kingdom of God, as little could that ending of his life have called it into being without the foregoing doctrinal revelation. His doctrine is not indeed his lifework, but its reflection." And he opposes those "who contrast the 'teaching of Jesus' as Christianity with the apostolic 'teaching *about* Christ.'"—*New Testament Theology*, Beyschlag, p. 29.

ing, at that time, the story of the feeding the five thousand or the narrative of Christ's rejection at Nazareth. In the hour of inquiry about salvation men need to know only a few gospel facts and promises. That was the exact position of those to whom the gospel first came. They craved not historical narrative but spiritual knowledge. The heart in the new religion met their hearts. Its Christ became their personal Saviour. They knew it, not in a book, but in an experience.

But there would come a time when these converts would ask about the life of this Christ before he came to the world, and John's Gospel in its opening verses would make answer. There would come a time when fitly they would ask about his human advent, and they would find it described in the two Gospels which because of their evident design, would be likely to record the virgin birth. And so Paul's phrase, "born of a woman," enough for one time, would find its complemental statement in the details of Matthew and Luke. This is the experiential order rather than the historic, and this is the way that most millions receive the gospel in conversion. The new heart comes to accept a few great Christian facts for its own joy and salvation. The historic order of those facts is a matter for subsequent study. This experiential approach is that of men seeking the truth to-day and of men also in Paul's time, as shown by the Acts. The Epistles are not to be considered as deductions from the Gospels, since the Gospels were not then written;

but the Gospels are to be considered as filling out, in their detail of separate incidents, that which was necessarily lacking from the point of view of the Epistles.

And yet, while there is such a grand assertion of a comprehensive Christianity in Paul's earlier Epistles, whenever occasion requires it he can marshal specific details in the life of Jesus. His citation of the facts taught "by the revelation of Jesus Christ" in Galatians[1] and Corinthians[2] is an instance in point. His narration of the specific words used at the institution of the Lord's Supper[3] is also to be noted. His remarkable recognition of the antecedent glory and subsequent humiliation of the Lord shows that, if the occasion did not demand the detail of the facts, he still had in mind the whole matter of the virgin birth: "For our sakes he beggared himself, that we through his beggary might be enriched."[4] So, too, we have those other words: "He, existing in the form of God, did not consider an equal state with God a thing to be grasped and held, but emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being made in the likeness of man."[5] These are crucial tests in the discussion of God's revelation in Christ. They tell the story of Luther that in the presence of the words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" he sat dumb for a long time. He could take no food. He was as motionless as a corpse. He saw and heard nothing about him. He was entranced

[1] Gal. i, 11–24. [2] 1 Cor. xv, 3. [3] 1 Cor. xi, 25–28.
[4] 2 Cor. viii, 9. [5] Phil. ii, 6–8.

and overpowered by these inexplicable words. Awaking at length to his normal consciousness, he cried out, "Forsaken of God! Forsaken of God! Who can understand it?" And he ventured on no analysis of the strong words. Luther's course in not subjecting the agony in the Lord's words to any analysis commends itself as wise. And Paul's great words about Christ as "beggaring himself" in the Incarnation are quoted, not to exhaust them by any explanation, but to show that he knew of the virgin birth and so gives world-wide testimony to the fact.

And the other Epistles yield us testimony, both the later ones of Paul and those of Peter and John. True, the point of vision in the case of Peter and John somewhat differs from that of Paul. For Paul had no such knowledge of Christ before his resurrection as had Peter and John. They knew the Lord with a personal intimacy in the days of his earthly sojourn, while Paul's vision of the Lord Jesus on the way to Damascus was the vision of the risen and glorified Lord. Hence the larger stress Paul always lays on resurrection. But in contrast therewith Peter gives us, in his Epistles, the sorrowing, burdened Christ, the One "put to death in the flesh."[1] He is the One who shed "the precious blood as of a Lamb without blemish."[2] He "suffered for us in the flesh."[3] The earthly life of the Lord was presented, and believers were "partakers of Christ's sufferings."[4] But Paul's

[1] 1 Pet. iii, 18.
[2] 1 Pet. i, 19.
[3] 1 Pet. iv, 1.
[4] 1 Pet. ii, 21.

gaze was less on the past and more on the future. Resurrection for those that "sleep in Christ" is one of his favorite themes. And it is the "second Adam, the Lord from heaven,"[1] who is to bring this about as the completion of the work begun when "he was born of a woman."

John, in his Epistles, seems afraid that his insistence on the divine nature of Christ should be understood as either a denial or a depreciation of the human nature of his Lord. He combats, in the opening words of his first letter, the idea, which seems to have come in, that Christ had only a phantom body. To meet the error, engendered it may be of a misconception of his own teaching, he opens his first letter with these words: "That which we have seen with our own eyes, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; we have seen, and bear witness of that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."[2] Here we have the same conception. The human nature is not joined to the divine, nor the divine nature to the human, but the divine nature becomes the human nature. Here, also, as in Paul and Peter, it is not the idea of two natures, the one partially or wholly absorbed in the other, but it is the idea of one divine Being revealed as man to men. John's words, if not deeper than those of Paul and Peter, are more concise. They show God manifested as Christ. And this is exactly Paul's idea as expressed by the words "God manifest in the flesh." In all three apostles this Christ

[1] 1 Cor. xv, 45. [2] 1 John i, 1–3.

is the One with whom Christians had then to do. The conception of John in his Epistles, as well as that in the minds of his brethren, is that Jesus has taken for them the place of God. The humanity of the Incarnate One had been discounted in favor of his divinity, which was universally acknowledged. Christ's antecedence "in the bosom of the Father"[1] must have been a difficult article of faith for these Jewish monotheists to accept, but their Epistles show a complete surrender to the idea. And more: the difficulty inherent in this idea to every human mind seems not once, so far as any hint is on record, to have been a cause of stumbling to them. They reverently took the facts, and were less perplexed than worshipful before the mystery of God incarnate as the Christ.

James, the Apostle of the Practical, in his Epistle has less to say than the others about the nature of God as revealed in Christ. The man, the theme, the occasion, and the aim so evident in the whole Epistle, will account for this peculiarity. But, on the other hand, it has been noticed that, since he speaks of "the Lord" as one whose "coming draweth nigh,"[2] the reference must be to "the Lord Jesus Christ." And the conception in the whole Epistle is not only that of Christ who has come and who will come, but of Christ who, having passed through a mortal life, is now living in heaven; One whose eye is keen to detect the real character of each man and the inner motive in each deed. To James the heavenly Christ retains the quick ear and

[1] 1 John i, 18. [2] James v, 7-9.

the sharp eye, and his approval or disapproval is instant for the practical living of each believer.

Just here a few words may be said about the Epistles, taken as a whole, in their treatment of the idea of Christ's incarnation. Their tone when they refer to this idea is remarkable. They all have a peculiar way of conceiving of the relation which Christ bore to the Father. There are two distinct points of view: that of his personal and that of his *official* relation to God. These writers of the Epistles are not unaware of the mystery of the human and the divine, but, clearly, the mystery though recognized does not perplex. They accept it, as they go on to describe its working in the spectacle of salvation procured for man. They use the given fact rather than dissect it. They see that in his incarnation he is always one being, and yet they also see that some of his acts emphasize the human more than the divine, and others of them show more of the divine than of the human. It has been urged that this could not be if he were one being, with a single consciousness. But that matter did not trouble these writers of our Epistles. And those who urge it to-day confuse two things: the manifestation of the Lord, and his essential nature. A manifestation is something to be seen. Popularly, indeed, we are wont to say that "we see the man in his acts." But do we? We see only manifestations of certain qualities, not the very selfhood of the man himself. And precisely as we see Christ's manifestation in one way in his childhood and in another way in manhood, so we see

humanity especially displayed in some deeds and divinity in others. For purposes of our analysis we separate them, assigning, in a general way of speaking, one class of things to the one nature only. Here, we sometimes say, he is man; there, he is God; and it is probably impossible not so to speak. But this is to speak in the way of our human apprehension, rather than to speak definitely of the essential nature of the Lord himself. That words sometimes should be used in adaptation to a learner's weakness might be granted. They might be justified in the case of an apostle addressing his early converts. But such words, if their presence in the Epistles should be admitted, would not hinder but that, in some crucial passages like those elsewhere quoted in this discussion, the writers should strike a deeper tone, especially when the theme is the real and essential nature of their Lord. And these writers are not conscious of any disagreement in their two presentations of Jesus, as both human and divine, with their idea, so often expressed, that Jesus was a single person with an individual consciousness. Their incidental allusions to him in all these personal relations are very significant. He was "the man Christ Jesus." But he was also the preexistent and eternal, "God manifested in the flesh."

And Christ's official relation, as well as his essential nature, is clearly taught in the Epistles when the writers discourse of the Incarnation. In setting forth this official position the various relations of man to man are necessarily employed. No one of these can

cover the whole ground, can express the whole truth. The relation of sovereign to subject is employed by these writers. Jesus was thus subject to his Father. He himself declared that in this relation his Father was greater than himself, and the Epistles represent him as coming to do the will of God. He "learned obedience." He subjected himself to his God. He came "under law." The Incarnation is not conceived of by the writers of the Epistles as founded in any "monism" in which man and God are one in substance, one in nature. For in that case there could be no incarnation, no real and actual condescension in God becoming man. Nor is there anything to forbid that, in this state of condescension, while equal in nature with God, he should be conscious that in wearing our flesh he was for a time voluntarily acting on a lower plane. He was a subject under law to a superior, and so could say, "My Father is greater than I." "He made himself of no reputation . . . being found in fashion as a man."[1] The essential human nature of two men shows them equals, but one of them may be the sovereign of a vast kingdom and the other the sovereign's prime minister—the latter officially lower than the other. The Epistles, looking upon Jesus as "born of a woman, made under the law," see him at his virgin birth as "one sent," and also see him as he takes for himself voluntarily an inferior position. Appointed to an official place, at the incarnation he is saying, "I come to do thy will, O God." But then we

[1] Phil. ii, 7.

must remember that all such figures drawn from human relations are limited in application. They can set forth only one aspect. The presentation has in it obvious difficulties. It must not be pressed too far. It is easy to make it mean too much; to see it as the exclusive method of conceiving of the relation of Jesus to God; but within due bounds, and with due respect to other ways of setting forth the fact, it does help us in getting one side of a vast truth before our minds and hearts.

Looking still further through the Epistles, we find the incarnation of Jesus presented in another form. Now the comparison is taken from the courts of justice. This conception has been called the "forensic idea" and sometimes the "judicial idea." It employs legal terms. It conceives of man as a sinner, as a being who has violated God's law, and of Christ as the "righteous Advocate" before God in behalf of man. True, the conception came from the Old Testament, but Jesus himself took it up and spoke of his blood "which is shed for many." And his apostles—all of them who have left us any words of their own—were persistent in this mode of representation. In this aspect of our Lord's official position his incarnation may be considered less as a preparation for the atonement and more as a part of it. The verses in which this presentation is found are far too many for quotation here. And the relation in itself is too obviously true for any to represent it as a peculiarity of the mental and educational status of a single apostle.

But in this comparison, drawn from legal affairs, as in that derived from the relation of sovereign and subject, only a part of the relation in which Jesus stood to God can be set forth. It is merely an approximation; an attempt, so far as a comparison with something familiar in common life will do it, to get on toward a better understanding of the official relation of the Christ to Him who sent this Christ into the world by the way of the birth at the manger. An illustration largely helpful up to a certain point, the analogy must not be pressed too far.

It is the same with the filial relation. Jesus had found in the Old Testament the word "Father" applied to God. It did not express essential being. It did not define an attribute. It did not declare a perfection. It was a happy figure drawn from the relation of parent and child, and it set forth, by the most precious of all possible terms, the filial aspect of Jesus toward the God whom he delighted to call "the Father." This was his dearest name for God; and "the Son" was his dearest name for himself. It came closest to the heart. It involved so much else that the Epistles take it up and sometimes introduce their message by references to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." There are those who make this comparison, derived from the paternal and filial relation, the whole setting forth alike of God before and in and after the Incarnation. They ask nothing more; forgetful that a figure drawn from any earthly relationship can never be a final definition, but must always remain a vivid

and blessed description; a description immeasurably significant. To those men writing the Epistles, the divine Sonship stood in the divine Fatherhood. Incarnation was the only way in which the Fatherhood could be presented as a concrete fact. God could be a Father if Jesus was a Son—an Only Begotten Son. Not that this conception annihilated the parallel conceptions of God as Creator, Sovereign, and final Judge; but it was, together with them, one way of apprehending God, and it was a way that took hold of the hearts of men. Of course, like the other presentations, this mode had its limitations. It could be pressed unduly and made an excuse for human presumption in continuous sin, but held as these apostles held it, it was not only a comfort and a joy but a very rapture. Their words of exultation ring out in the ears of the whole world. God is the Father because Jesus is the Son.

And there is yet another comparison taken up and worked out by these men—that of vitality. The branch is in the vine, the vine is in the root. Jesus himself had used the figure of the vine and the branches. And the Epistles work strongly that preposition "in" which the Master's word must have taught the disciples. They were in him, and he in turn was in God. There was the oneness of the divine and the human will between the Lord and the disciples. But these men were saved from all pantheism here by the Incarnation. Unity of purpose was not necessarily unity of nature. But over and over again where you expect these Epistles to say "God" you find them using the name "Christ." It is

the principle of vitality. Their own inner feeling under the guidance of the Holy Spirit seems to have led them to use any and every analogy in nature, in providence, in social, in business, and in political life, to set forth some phase of the relation that, when they had done their all, no words were competent to express. And, moreover, the Incarnation made all things new, and so they in turn illustrated the ever-living fact. All life was seen to mean more because a new life had come into the world. Each birth suggested the birth at the manger. Each life might be lived in a new way since the Incarnate One had entered into the life of our enlarged humanity. "In him was life," and by him all things were seen to "consist." His life and death and his return at the resurrection were not barren historic facts; for there was in the Incarnation a certain potency to impart a peculiar spiritual vitality, alike to the writers and readers of these Epistles.

4. We come now to the testimony of the Gospels. In our four evangelists we have unique sketches of the incarnate Christ. They give us something better than biography. A great Greek scholar has said that, if a daily newspaper, with its sketches of passing events and personages, had been published at Athens in the palmy days of that city, he would give more for one number of that paper than for all that has ever been written upon the social and domestic, the literary and religious life of the men then living. These four evangelists furnish us with scenes in Christ's life such as we could never have had from any studied and careful

biography. They show the Incarnation as a daily fact. The simple unstudied narration of event after event, involving sometimes the human, sometimes the divine, and sometimes a strange mingling of the two in what was evidently the one consciousness of Jesus, is the thing at which men never cease to wonder in all the successive generations.

As to their value as witnesses, one has only to submit himself to the charm of their story to feel that these men are transparently truthful. The sunshine is the best evidence of the existence of the sun. Such men can best answer the questions converts would soon come to ask about the circumstances of our Lord's birth.

In two of our Gospels the unique story of the virgin birth is given us; in one of them, that of Luke, the detailed circumstances cover two chapters. Now and then some one is found who hesitates to accept these chapters, though admitting all the rest of the Lord's life to be miraculous. But any incarnation carries with it the miraculous at its beginning, as well as at the middle and at the end. And there are especial confirmations of these two chapters which record not only the birth but the angelic appearances and the significantly peculiar utterances of Mary and Elisabeth, and give the whole historic setting. They locate, so to say, the whole matter, giving date and political environment. These chapters cannot be additions made in or before the second century to the original document; for the style, not only of language but of thought in

those centuries, has come down to us in certain forgeries known as "apocryphal gospels," and their frivolous tone in describing the advent is an instant confutation of their claim, to anyone to-day who believes in our Gospels. The existence of such writings shows how impossible it was to add to the original documents any considerable statement, much less two whole chapters, on so important a matter.

In reference to the literary agreement of these two chapters with the rest of Luke's Gospel, an agreement that takes in the use not only of nouns but of verbs and adverbs set in a distinctive phraseology, Professor Sanday has shown, in his *Gospels of the Second Century,* that the argument for the genuineness of the first two chapters is sustained. There is a remarkable use of the similar words and phrases. He says, "In the principal omission—that of the first two chapters—containing 132 verses—there are forty-seven distinct peculiarities of style (that is, peculiarities characteristic of the Gospel of Luke generally) with 105 instances; and eighty-two characteristic words with 144 instances." But the *tone* of the chapters is as remarkable as is their literary significance. Had there been additions from subsequent centuries there would have been reference to the glory of this newborn Christ. The Christian exultation of the second or the subsequent centuries would have been infused into the words of Mary and of Elisabeth, of the angel and of Zacharias and Simeon. Instead of this they are all Jewish words of a time on which the light of Christianity had not

shined. The phrase, "Make ready a people prepared for him," is in the *Jewish* tone. Mary's great song is as distinctly Jewish; never passing beyond the old horizon into the sphere of Christ's glory as we find it described in the apostolic Epistles. Each prophecy of Zacharias, of Mary, and of Elisabeth is that of those standing within the old bounds and looking forward out of them into a time not yet come. There is no glow, as in the subsequent days; no sense of the present glory as it would have been seen by any Christian writer of the second century. They are, as we should expect if genuine, and as would be impossible in any second-century interpolation, the words of devout Jews standing on the dividing line of the two dispensations. The new mode of thinking and the new forms of utterance are wanting. The tone befits the time, the persons, the circumstances, and the occasion. Each one says and does what now we can see was the thing to have been said and done. There is no trace of devout second-century imagination expressing itself in the form of legends such as then existed. The story in Luke in its detail, and in Matthew in its conciseness, bears every mark of historicity.

And if given in two of our Gospels and omitted in two of them—this is exactly what might be expected. No shadow of doubt is cast upon the fact itself by these two omissions when we recall, what is evident to every reader, that no one of the Gospels undertakes to be a biography. They are sketches only, though with some little and general chronological order, and that

little attempt at order is always subservient to the special and definite design of the writer, each one having his own distinct purpose and selecting from the mass of material those events which would suit his special object in writing. Each of them writes without regard to the others. Luke has no wish to make his sketch harmonious with that of Mark or Matthew. Each omits or enlarges exactly as suits his especial aim and does his work of compiling in his own way.

If now we recall the obvious purpose of each of the four evangelists in writing his Gospel, we see at once why two of them record and why two of them omit the story of the virgin birth. The two omit it who, as we know their aim in writing, would be expected to do so, and it is clear why the others record it, why each of the two records it in his own way, and why the story at this point is narrowed in the one and at that point is broadened in the other Gospel. That these two men, by all means the two most intellectual and best trained of the evangelists, finding themselves so situated as best to know the details of the birth, should search out the special facts and so should make special record of them, is an exceedingly important fact when we consider the testimony they give. One of them, Matthew, writes for the Jewish world, to show the royalty of the Lord; the other, Luke, writes for the Gentile world, that all the nations may see how God has revealed a Saviour for the race. And the wisdom is likewise manifest that continued, through Luke, in the book we call "The Acts of the Apostles," the clear

story of "the Lord the Christ" who was manifested after his ascension as "the Lord the Spirit." The Spirit was to "guide them into all truth." And if any hidden incident needed to be disclosed and recorded, and if no diligence of theirs could recover it from its obscurity, the promised Holy Spirit was their aid. He could not only recall to them whatsoever they had forgotten, but he could reveal to them facts they could not know of themselves. Thus these men were equipped as witnesses for God and his Christ, and this divine guidance, working through each man's freedom in the selection of materials and style of composition, has brought about a singular harmony in their work. The undesigned coincidences are a striking confirmation of their accuracy, while their differences are just those that honest witnesses, intent on testifying to what they personally noticed, are sure to exhibit. Like the pictures of the stereoscope, taken at different angles but seen as blended into one, these narrations show a unity far exceeding that of mere words. It is one Person whom they show at the manger, at the sepulcher, and at every intermediate point in the Lord's career.

It has been objected that we have no direct testimony from the less conspicuous members of the apostolic band. But the fact that we have no adverse testimony from them shows, under the circumstances, at least their acquiescence in the statements "commonly believed;" their agreement with the vast mass of the testimony of the earliest believers as to the Christian

facts. Then, too, while we have no writings directly ascribed to these less known men, is it not highly probable that the compilers of our Christian documents quoted freely from the oral gospels of their brethren; perhaps, also, from the screeds originally furnished to those who wrote our Gospels and Epistles? It is certainly easier and more natural to account in this way for the abrupt transitions and fragmentary paragraphs that are found in our Gospels than to suppose, as some have done, a full *logia,* a lost gospel, which Matthew and Mark and even John used as the common basis of their narrations. If this view is accepted, then we can claim the testimony of the less conspicuous of the apostles to the whole story of Christ's life as given by those who were called to "set in order the things commonly believed" by the early disciples. What need of their attempting the work of furnishing other gospels when all they would say was better said by those who were called by their own genius and by the Holy Spirit to do this very thing? If their testimony is already incorporated in the Gospels and Epistles we can ask no more.

Of the capacity as well as the integrity of Matthew in setting forth the royal aspect of his Lord's life nothing further needs to be said than that these are equaled by Luke in his peculiar presentation of Christ as the world's Saviour, with a gospel for universal humanity. Gentile and Jew are one for Luke. His view is that Christ descended not only from David and Abraham but from "Adam, who was the son of God."

And the crisp, graphic story of Mark, dealing largely with the outer life of the Lord, is well set over against the peculiarly spiritual view of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, who had lain on his bosom and felt the inner throb of his heart. And so, considering the aim of each evangelist, we see why he dwells as he does on this or the other fact, and equally why he passes lightly over this or the other event, or omits it altogether. The very omissions show the consistency of each writer in carrying out his one distinct purpose.

Moreover, the doctrinal form of these facts as given by our New Testament writers is very significant. They use them not only by way of narration but of moral explanation. And this use of them is an indirect testimony not only to the reality of the facts but to the integrity of the writers. The merely narrative statement gives the bare fact. The doctrinal statement goes on, beyond the fact, to its relations. The one sees a star outside of all other stars; the other sees the star as none the less a star because included in the whole system of astronomy.

The evangelists are not usually classed as doctrinal teachers, and yet, though their usual method is narration, the Gospels abound in doctrine. Jesus, according to them, spoke of his "doctrine." The men he met were doctrinal in their training, in their temper of mind, and even in their forms of speech. "They were astonished at his doctrine." By that standard they judged him, and with reference to that standard in their minds he constantly addressed them. He could

be understood by them only by adapting himself in some degree to their literary method. They had their doctrine, more or less to be corrected by him, of God and of the Messiah, their doctrine of the Forerunner as Elias, their doctrine of a resurrection and a future life, their doctrine of angels and of demons, their doctrine of a judgment and of eternal awards. And even in the final trial of Jesus he was asked of his "doctrine." The evangelists, who never stop to utter exclamations of wonder at the strange events of our Lord's life, do sometimes pause a moment to tell us that our Lord's statements in given cases were caused by the wrong doctrine which was taught by his opponents. He would set them right in their doctrinal belief. He corrects their doctrines of the Sabbath, of divorce, of the resurrection, and the judgment. Neither did he in his words or the evangelists in their record ever cast any slur on doctrine as doctrine—as though it were of no importance what men believed if their conduct were only right. He traced "right doing," in any full sense of that phrase, to the truth, in which alone stands human duty. His severest words were for the blasting of those who neglected truth and overlooked that inward spiritual conviction which only the truth firmly believed could evoke in their souls—the men who cared only for "the outside of the cup and the platter." He insisted that he "came out from the Father" and that God's testimony to him should be received and believed. His doctrine of himself he made so conspicuous that the men who wanted to be religious only

in general, and without actual and obedient faith in himself, "went away" murmuring, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" It was his "doctrine" that caused the disturbance at the synagogue at Nazareth, the rejection at Capernaum, and the crucifixion at Jerusalem. His teaching, not his miracles, not his blameless conduct, stirred the wrath of those who hunted him to the death. High priest and Pilate and Herod all inquired in his last days on earth about "his doctrine." By asserting, as some would have had him do, that "doctrine is nothing and life is all," he could easily have placated his enemies and escaped his death. He claimed to have come from heaven, as John has recorded in his opening chapter. He claimed to be "one with the Father;" and he so exhibited himself to the astonished disciples at the Transfiguration. He said he should "rise from the dead," and he did it. He emphasized the great facts of his own career, making them not unconnected events but parts of "the faith," thus compelling, in all believers, some form of doctrinal statement.

And there is a peculiar form of witness borne to these facts of the Incarnation in these later centuries. The facts are reflected in the experiences of the soul. There is spiritual correspondence to the historical events which constitute an incarnation. The brain is not the only thing to be satisfied, the heart has also its demands. There is a spiritual logic. There is a vital eye for the spirit's vision. The soul is the sensitive plate on which the sunlight writes the exact image of

the object toward which the camera is directed. The conception of God incarnate in Jesus Christ so supplies the deepest want that such men cry out, "To whom else shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." If you could make the flowers of summer testify, they would bear witness that their colors were just so much concentrated sunlight. You can look at them and see the spectrum of the sun. Every beauty they exhibit is from the orb of day. They are more than mirrors, for they retain as well as reflect the light of the sun. Some of these Christians are not trained in formal logic to defend therewith their faith in the Incarnation, but they have the surer logic of the soul. Their Christ is "Immanuel, God with us," as a common experience in life. The impression comes in upon them with a singularly convincing power, as they study the birth and life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that these things are so. This Christ has wrought a great transformation in them. The inward evidence is so strong that they cannot forbear giving their testimony to the world. The flower testifies to the sun from which came all its beauty. The mirror testifies to "the face of Jesus Christ." The eye, made vital and sympathetic, sees a Christ in these New Testament pages who must have existed in order to be depicted. Take these wonderfully conspiring circumstances in the happy unity of their divinely human comprehensiveness as they are given in Gospel and Epistles, and how surely they carry with them to prepared souls a singularly self-evidencing power! A little child is

born out of the heart of a mother who had been prepared for that birth by expectations peculiarly warranted. Angel faces look down out of heaven upon that scene. Shepherds see on that night an unwonted glory on all the world and in the sky, and hear snatches of a celestial song that sings of a reunion of earth and heaven. Strangers from far-away lands, led by divine guidance, through their accustomed siderial study, seek the place of that birth. There is the simplicity of the manger over against the craft of a king's cruel mandate. There is the sweet confidence of the mother, and the strong belief in her by him who assumed the place of her protector, and so found his confidence in God confirmed. In telling the story, the evangelists attempt no highly wrought description. All has the simplicity and naturalness of the scene itself. The story is told easily, credibly, and lovingly. It delights youth and instructs age. The picture has one tone, with no suggestion of a single discordant element. It fits the world's expectation, as well as the world's want, and so it is believable. More and more study makes it at once a necessity and a certainty. It ought to be true, and so the swift logic of the satisfied heart rests in it. Its homeliness alike of incident and record, its artlessness, its suggestiveness, carry with them a kind of moral conviction which adds to the historic proofs. And the fact in its historic form admits, nay, demands, the widest interpretation. It is the section of a circle which includes in its vast sweep the whole circumference of spiritual truth. For, see: this truth

occurs amid surroundings so indicative of the common course of human life that all natural things are lifted into a new spiritual meaning, and the round world is another place since Christ came into it. Over these secular things there is thrown a sacred glory and all common circumstances have an uncommon meaning. The Christ has come among them, and they are all glorified by him who came not to the highest *status* of court or temple but to the sphere of humble life and lived amid the lowliest things. Nothing is mean any more, or ordinary, useless or hopeless. He who honored social life by his miracle at Cana has sanctified childhood in its earliest helplessness, even when its untoward surroundings are so lowly as that manger at Bethlehem. And thus commonest persons and lowliest places and most obscure positions are such only in outward form and never in inward meaning. Loneliness is only outward, for God came once and was "Immanuel, God with us." And he came to show that behind all physical condition there is a moral condition that, using each physical thing rightly, makes it a part of the moral order of the world and gets for it a place in the kingdom Christ came to establish. If a manger can be so noble what may not any spot become? And thus Christ in that manger, with shepherds representing one section of our mortal life, and with astronomers representing another, and with angels over all rejoicing in the highest glory now to come to men, and in the peace to each believing soul, and by and by to the whole believing world—this is a precious segment

of the moral fact symbolized by the historic fact at Bethlehem. But that historic picture, divinely set forth and standing out in perfect beauty on the historic page, could never have been so depicted but that the facts had so occurred. Seen, it convinces. It is so true, that once true, it can never be true again. There need not be, and so cannot be, another such birth. This Incarnation fills up the full measure. There is nothing over and beyond. All possibility is exhausted in the one certainty. Itself is its own evidence to the men who are morally sympathetic in all ages.

It is also especially worthy of our notice that the men who bear written witness, whether in Old Testament or in New Testament times, all are Hebrews, and so their testimony has additional value for the wide world.[1] The Hebrew alone had kept in fair purity the

[1] Strangely enough, the fact that the writers of the four Gospels were all Hebrews has been urged as an objection—as if Hebrews then living in Palestine were not the very persons who should be the best witnesses. But immediately after them the men who vouch for the existence, integrity, authenticity, and inspiration of the four Gospels are Gentiles. The first one hundred and eighty years of the Christian era are swept by the testimony of Irenæus, who gives not only his own belief but that of the Christian churches before his own day. He had known, intimately, Polycarp, who had kept close company with the apostle John and had testified to John's story of what Jesus did and said, and the story of others "who had seen the Lord." He distinctly remembered the incidents of Polycarp's time, and how Polycarp would describe his intercourse with John and his familiarity with those who had seen the Lord, and how he would relate their words. And whatsoever he had heard from them about the Lord and about his miracles and about his teachings Polycarp, as having received from eyewitnesses the life of the Word, would relate altogether in accordance with the Scriptures. (See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History,* book v, 20.)

Irenæus uses our four Gospels as freely and fully and reverently, quoting them for authoritative statement, as do the most careful theologians of to-day. He quotes by name the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and then says of them: "So firm is the ground on which these Gospels rest that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them [that is, their existence], and starting from these each one of them endeavors to establish his own peculiar doctrine" (*Ante-Nicene*

primal idea of the one true and living God. God had been no mere tribal divinity, for he had been worshiped before the sons of Jacob had been the fathers of the Hebrew tribes. This idea of the one God had taken on constantly increasing clarity, had been steadily gaining in moral qualities through prophetic rites and prophetic men. Those grand old prophets were men to whom, in addition to their natural genius for religion, there had been given a divine inspiration for guidance and elevation and foresight. Sometimes they did not understand the full meaning of their own words, speaking better than they knew.[1] They saw nearest things of national history, but they had also the vital eye and the glance onward to the farthest things of the kingdom of God. Their divine inspiration no more changed their style of composition than it changed the features of their faces. Their patriotism was lifted sometimes into a religion; and in describing the "Hope of Israel" they saw him as also the "Hope of the Gentiles." Each man used his own faculties at their utmost and in his own peculiar way; so that we

Library, vol. i, pp. 292, 293). It is to be noted that he is speaking for all the churches in Asia Minor, where he was born and had exercised his ministry, and also for the church at Rome he had first visited, as well as for those in southern Gaul where he was writing. It is not questioned that all these Gentile churches held to the historicity of our four Gospels. Subsequently, in the fourth century, because it stood in the way of their views about Christ's person and work, an heretical sect held that John's Gospel was later.

It could hardly be expected that Jewish writers contemporary with our evangelists should give testimony to Christ. Even if the famous passage in Josephus were genuine it would be but a single item of testimony from one who, as a Jew, would say as little as possible, since his peculiar national prejudices are evident on every page. And he is the only Jewish writer of that time whose works have come down to us.

[1] 1 Pet. i, 11.

have the happy variety of historic writing, legal record, wisdom literature, psalm of devotion, proverb of practical life, homely sketch, brotherly letter, and apocalyptic vision; thus providing for an age, now upon the world, when the religion that is founded on authentic documents, which can endure critical investigation and so furnish direct proof of historic fact, is the only religion that can make serious claim on thoughtful men.

In the case of the New Testament writers there were special circumstances that confirm our trust in their accuracy. The age when Jesus appeared, so far from being credulous, was especially skeptical. This fact, admitted by all as to the general Roman world, had come to be partially true inside the Jewish nation. Its largest sect was that of the Sadducees, who denied that there was direct proof of angel or spirit. They were the moralists of a narrow and materialistic creed. The Hebrew still boasted of an ancestry great in its faith in the one God, but the venerated tradition was no more a stimulus to the active virtues which had made that ancestry so conspicuous. And the whole nation was religious more by rote and rule than by spirit and life. Hitherto the eras of miracle had not been those of the strongest faith, but of the weakest; for the times of strongest faith had not needed them. But at an era when piety had become mainly a creed and chiefly a form, when for centuries even prophecy had ceased, and while the general belief in God had not waned, yet the ideals of virtue had become only

traditional—at such an age the new miracle of all miracles, the advent of the incarnate Son, was the especial need of the nation. The general correctness of creed as to God had kept evermore before their minds one other belief warranted by their sacred writings, which they had ascribed to God's own inspiration. It was the expectation of a Messiah. But they had debased the idea. The political leader who should head a revolt against the Roman power and secure universal national dominion for the Jewish nation was their conception of the Christ. Such a kind of Christ as was Jesus had never been imagined. The spiritual King of a spiritual kingdom was utterly foreign to all their ideas. And even the chosen twelve were continually, during Christ's ministry, falling back to this crass conception; a conception that has had a strange persistence in the Christian centuries. The need, therefore, of a special divine gift of the Holy Spirit was manifest to let the disciples into the meaning of the facts they had seen, and equally, to enable them so to select out of their material the facts and so to describe them as not to misrepresent the fundamental idea of Christ and his teaching in their written Gospels. When one sees in Browning's "The Ring and the Book," in how many different ways, each leaving a different moral impression, the same story may be honestly told, it is clear that to leave each evangelist to an uninspired narration of the story of Christ's life were almost as sad as never to have a Christ come to the world. If it were worth while to send him it were worth while to

send the Holy Spirit to those who were chosen of God to report him. Their conception of him was necessarily mistaken, apart from divine help. The kind of Christ they would have described would not have been the Christ himself. They had expected a Christ, but not *the* Christ. But their idea corrected by his idea changed all, and they became the best possible witnesses to the Incarnation.

And these witnesses who gave us the New Testament Christ, gave us the individualism of the Christ and his teaching of the individualism of each man in religion. Trained in the sociology of the old dispensation, which had nearly lost sight of individualism, they cared passionately, with all the Jews of their time, not for "the man" but for "the law" and for their own "Israel." The collective national life, in its well-being and its worship, was the idea of the time. "Salvation was of the Jews." God had indeed instituted a "peculiar people" who were to maintain, as a people, his public worship. Sociology was to have its best opportunity, and was to fail in everything except in preparing the way by that failure for the new individualism. Yet these men, incapable of originating or even imagining such a complete reversal of religious conception, when they came under the influence of Jesus and felt his power as a personal presence on their minds and hearts, could in some degree appreciate the new status of the individual. The individual Christ spoke to the individual man. He named "the Church" but once, and then in an anticipatory way.

He himself, while living, formed no organization. He did not know Jew as Jew or Roman as Roman. He only knew the man as a man. The change in conception was immense. These disciples, after the Lord left the earth, are found carrying out practically a conception they could never have originated. Strangely changed they had become by contact with his unique personality, and by his idea of the personality of every man of the race. Only in this way could they have been prepared to be his witnesses in word and in deed, in public address and in official document.

Further: if these men before their contact with Jesus had had any idea of a universal religion it was an exceedingly erroneous one. They may have held, with the best Jewish interpreters of their time, that the references to the Gentiles in their Scriptures, meant that all Gentiles were to become Jews. But our Lord's doctrine, of individuality rather than nationality in religion, lifted all their conceptions so that, with Paul, they would not know even Christ himself "after the flesh" as a Jew. They saw that this one great fact of each man dignified with the opportunity to work out his own personal salvation through this personal Christ, was a solar fact that "lighteth every man that cometh into the world." The new faith made no war on the old distinction. It simply superseded it by a higher truth of an individual relation of each man in the race to God in this Christ. And this idea became a determinative one in Gospel and Epistle as these were written. Men bred ex-

clusively as Gentiles could not have understood the Jewish point of view. Paul, bred a Jew but taught in Gentile lore, could come the nearest to apprehending the peculiar position. Possibly, in some degree, his broad culture prepared him for a broader conception. But it looks as if his Gentile education had not broadened him until after he had met Christ and taken in the peculiar idea of Christ's mission to the individual man. So Peter, standing behind Mark in the latter's Gospel to the Roman world, shows that he has been broadened enough, by contact with outside thought, to be able to appreciate the standpoint from which Roman thought would look upon the Christ whose life he was to describe. But this broadening of Paul and Peter and of the other disciples was not by the way of a comparison, in which the best in heathenism was recognized, but the rather by way of contrast. Their idea of "comparative religion" found nothing in the outside beliefs but antagonism to their own faith in the One Ever-living God. There could be nothing good in any belief that denied God, the Source of all goodness. But the new breadth of these men was due to their reception in mind and heart of Christ's doctrine of individualism. This completely changed their point of view. This put them into the sympathy with him which was required in order to make them true witnesses to the Lord Jesus and to the fundamental idea of his teachings.

Thus the way was opened for them to see the divine helpfulness to men through sacrifice, and to enter into the spirit of it. Not that they were to make again "the

eternal redemption for us," in which Christ "offered himself to God," "an offering once for all;" but the spirit of self-sacrifice for others' good was to be seen in Christ, and the fascination of "caring for the other man" was to be felt by them. It was to throb in their oral teachings and in their careful records. Only by this new spirit of human helpfulness begotten in their hearts could they become true witnesses of the divine helpfulness shown in the Incarnation. And all these preparations converged in their work as these New Testament writers depicted the incarnate life of our Lord, from its beginning to its close, in Gospel and in Epistle. The miracle of miracles was the Christ himself; but next in order was the miracle of any fair depicting of that life in its relations to God and to man. We can recall the fact that literary artists have made sad work in modern times as they have attempted, even on the grand basis of the four Gospels, to construct a "Life of Jesus." Think of Strauss writing such a life and omitting or adding according to his own wish or whim; of Renan, who called his French novel a life of Christ; of a recent literary woman who gives us in our Lord the feminine in place of the masculine virtues; of even a Fleetwood, who presents to us a devotional Christ only; and of a host of others who err either on the side of making him a man and ignoring his divinity, or else of claiming his divinity and ignoring his humanity. And all this shows how delicate and difficult was the task set before the New Testament writers. These witnesses err on neither side.

He never is presented, when doing his most marvelous works, as acting out of character for him, nor when doing the common acts of a man as smirching his divine purity. Nowhere is he monstrous, nowhere absurd, nowhere at fault. His life proceeds, but it is no process in which he clears himself by degrees from human frailty. He grows out of himself, like an expanding flower. He makes his own impression, and it is unlike that of any other man who has ever lived. His utterances are simple in their nearest, but profound in their far-away meaning. They are not the careful results of long processes of thought or long years of study. They spring spontaneously from his lips. They never smell of the lamp. They are divinely natural for him. He is formed on no human ideal, certainly not on any Greek model, nor on the accepted Hebrew model of his day. Men have tried to invent "the model man;" but even at the hands of a Plato the failure is universally admitted. The model man cannot be invented; he must have lived, and he could only be described by men chosen and prepared and inspired of God as "witnesses of these things."

CHAPTER III.

The Testimony of the Witnesses.

In the opening chapter we considered the questions involved in an incarnation, and in the succeeding chapter the witnesses, their credibility, and the general scope of their testimony were discussed. It remains to examine specifically the testimony they offer.

Some years ago the writer of these pages went to see the sculptor Powers at his studio in Florence. As our party approached his rooms we had some idea, not necessarily very definite, about the objects one would be likely to find in a building where a noble artist had for years done work so praised by all the world. We thought of chisel and mallet and of molds and casts in plaster; of the various things necessary to the prosecution of the great art of the great artist. In the very idea of such work there were certain things essential to such a place and belonging naturally to such an art. Presently, on entering the workroom, we found the genial artist, mallet in hand and cap on head, in the act of directing his assistants. A statue in marble was under way, in which a plaster model was followed closely. The artist explained his work. Just enough was exhibited in the marble to enable us to see the conception. The marble was designed to belie its silence and to speak a truth in

the face of the whole world. Here and there a touch of the artist's own hand had finished a detail. Years afterward that statue, "Lincoln Freeing the Slave," came to America, and then the completed work, not a single detail wanting, became a joy to all who saw it. A friend looking upon it said, "Studio first, conception next, and last of all the finished statue."

So it is here in the study before us. The questions necessarily involved in an incarnation, the broad, strong conception as shown in the first Epistles and in the responsive faith of the earliest Christians before the Gospels were written out; and then, last of all, the careful details of the evangelists supplemented by the later Epistles and the Apocalypse—these given us, the whole finished work stands before us for our wonder and our joy.

But before examining, with what of care we are able, the detailed account of the evangelists, we may fitly recall the fact that the writers of the Epistles are thoroughly acquainted with the story of the Incarnation, taken as a whole, and that they give us more single events about the beginning and progress and ending of the earthly life of our Lord than we might have expected when we consider their position and their object in writing. Of course the form of their statement is not the narrative form, and only incidentally are their words definitive. Paul, though not alone in this method of bearing witness, may be considered, because of his more extended writings, as leading the others in this definiteness of allusion.

In a previous chapter, on the "Witnesses to the Incarnation," Paul was cited as one who claimed in some things to be a witness, and incidentally several of his more direct statements were given.[1] He claims for himself, and continually claims for those to whom he is writing, a certain amount of knowledge. He knew and they knew of the "oral gospels:" the gospel story told by word of mouth—the method of his time, the method by which some of the foremost literature of these ages has come down to us. He is constantly using such phrases as "we know," phrases which not only imply but assume and assert the historic facts of the beginning and progress and closing of our Lord's earthly career. He had gone up to Jerusalem "to see Peter, and abode with him" and possibly James for those memorable "fifteen days," as he says in his Epistle to the Galatians. The historical facts, in their factual form rather than their doctrinal, would certainly be gone over very carefully by them. He, of all men, would seek the historic basis on which everything depended. His careful training made him the man of all men to examine the whole thing. Enough time had elapsed for dispassionate study of the matter, but not enough to permit the least myth to gather about the original facts. Such a man's testimony under such circumstances leaves no more to be desired. Let it be carefully borne in mind, however, that he does not write as an historian, nor is he composing treatises. He is writing "letters" to brother Chris-

[1] See page 59.

tians who know the gospel facts as well as he himself. They are in no need that he should rehearse them, but only that he should use these accepted facts for their spiritual and ethical profit. When we put ourselves in his place, and that of those to whom he is writing, we may well be surprised that he uses so many of them. He names the beginning of Christ's life, not as a sudden creation, but as one "born of a woman." And if he omits, as his plan required of him, many of the smaller details of the life, it is because he felt nearer to the Lord's death and resurrection, and these carried all the rest with them. They were keystones of the arch, determining the shape and position of every member of the structure. He names the trial "before Pilate,"[1] and asserts that there was another among the "rulers of this world" who had had a share in the deed when Jesus was "crucified."[2] Indeed, he describes the form of Christ's death at least twenty times, while there are nearly as many indirect allusions to that fact, and he is particular to say that Christ was put to death not only for others but by others. There are sixty of these references in his Epistles. He gives not only the burial of Jesus but the exact number of days he was in the sepulcher, and he names his resurrection twenty times. He enumerates the witnesses to that event and puts himself among the number, as one who afterward saw the risen Lord.[3] But all this is incidental to his main purpose. His conception is largely doctrinal; the doctrine resting wholly on the historic fact

[1] 1 Tim. vi, 13. [2] 1 Cor. ii, 8. [3] 1 Cor. xv, 6-8.

that Christ was born, lived, died, and rose again and has returned to his native heaven. It will be enough to quote again, in a new relation, his words previously cited: "For our sakes he beggared himself, that we through his beggary might be enriched."[1] Also, "He, existing in the form of God, did not consider an equal state with God a thing to be grasped and held, but emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being made in the likeness of man."[2] Used in this way, to set forth the existence-form of God as taking the existence-form of man, the words "form of God" cannot denote "resemblance," but the rather the "formal substance." It is reality in God taking on reality in man. These expressions burden language. "Self-beggary" and "self-emptying"—for this is the exact significance of the words—declare an original state of divine glory, a sharing on terms of equality with God, and this voluntarily surrendered by the same person. He had been "the image of the invisible God," "the express image of his substance." Language is impotent here. We are beyond our depth. But such language, which we should not dare to use of ourselves, is given us for our adoring thought. We may even venture to repeat it after the apostle; each word weighty, the whole thought not comprehended but only apprehended; as our eye does not comprehend the ocean, but we so far apprehend it as to know there is an ocean; some of its waves breaking at our feet, others of them rolling far on out of our

[1] 2 Cor. viii, 9. [2] Phil. ii, 7, 8.

sight and dashing on the unseen shores of a distant continent.

This Christ, his personality unchanged, does not add humanity to divinity, for that would not be an incarnation at all. It would not be the "self-beggary," or, as it has been translated, "the impoverishment." But not ceasing to be divine he becomes man, which for such a Person is a real and not an assumed humiliation. And in that state this very Person has a genuine human experience.[1] He, as actually "the Son of God," becomes as actually "the Son of man." "God," *the whole God,* "was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." There can be no explanation, but only the reception of a fact upon the testimony of God, who alone can know and alone can tell us of the fact. By faith in God's declaration alone, we receive the truth about this matter which he has revealed. For these remarkable words can mean no less than this. We do not, cannot, understand how it is, but only that it is. "God in Christ" is neither more nor less difficult than the conception of God apart from Christ would be. For any conception of the mode of God's being is mysterious.

But this mystery in our Lord's nature prepares us to accept the holy mystery of the virgin birth. In a way all the facts of Christ's marvelous career, and so all the doctrines of his religion founded on these facts, hang upon the primal fact of his entrance into our

[1] See Van Dyke, *Gospel for an Age of Doubt*, p. 147.

human life; an entrance which should be as fitly unique as the life itself.

Let us examine the contents of the evangelic testimony in our four Gospels.

We have two genealogical tables, both of them plainly taken from public Jewish registers. Evidently these evangelists give them exactly as they find them. The peculiar grouping of Matthew into three classes, each of fourteen generations, gives clear indication that this was an exact transcription of Hebrew records—a kind of oriental mnemonics. Had there been any attempt by the Gospel writers to make the least change in these documents, the thing would have been detected by sharp-eyed opponents and the denunciation of fraud would not have been allowed to die out of the world's memory. One of these tables is given in Luke and one is given in Matthew. If any discrepancy can be shown, the trouble would not be in the transcription given by the Gospel writers, but must be in the rolls themselves. Then we should only have to say that there were ways of setting down the genealogical facts which are not known to us, and that any variations which caused no trouble to the Jews of that day would not disturb us if we knew their methods of making up these tables. In that case we should be obliged to confess, as we often must in the whole subject of ancient dates, that the matter is obscure. Says Rev. Dr. J. R. Thompson, "Chronology is peculiarly difficult when we have to do with oriental modes of computation, which are essentially different from ours." By degrees the

obscurity has been cleared away in this case, and we are coming to see that Luke follows the table that traces the lineal, while Matthew follows the table that gives the royal descent. The lineal descent in Luke goes back to Abraham, by whom all men were to receive a blessing through the birth of the Coming One. Luke, however, is giving a universal gospel. He would show that the redemption is for all men, Gentiles as well as Jews. Jesus, as man's Saviour, has, accordingly, a pedigree extending back even beyond Abraham's day. It is to be expected that with such a purpose in mind Luke will trace the line back to Adam, the father of the race. Matthew's table is given to show not so much the lineal as the royal descent. In addressing his Gospel to the Jews he must indeed name Abraham, but his emphasis is upon the Lord as a son of a king—even King David. Hence Matthew does not go back, as does Luke, to Adam. His opening words are, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Writing for the Jews, he will show, by his citation from their own tables of kingly men, that the royal blood is in Jesus. Of course the two tables will not always agree. For sometimes the family and the royal descent are not the same. Even to-day the rules that govern succession to a throne make a royal succession to differ at some points from a strictly family line. In the case of our Lord the two tables coincide in a descent from both Abraham and David. But Luke, tracing his peculiar idea of the lineal descent, goes back to David;

then back to Abraham; then past Abraham to Adam, "who was the son of God." His idea is that the salvation in Jesus Christ brings everyone who believes in him back to the old Eden relation of sonship once more. Luke's Gospel is therefore broader than Matthew's. See Luke as he sets forth a Saviour long expected—until men's vision grew weary, but that Saviour has come at length for the whole race of Adam. The ordinary Jew in his narrowness, had wanted a temporal Saviour for his own nation. But the half-articulated want of the race—a universal Saviour from sin—is met by the gospel as Luke conceives of it. See in Luke's Gospel how glad is Zacharias.[1] That touch could not be in Matthew, but Luke must preserve that story; as also the songs of Elisabeth and the words of Mary.[2] Luke must tell us that the expected One was the "Son of the Highest."[3] Simeon and Anna in the temple, with their ascription, are given us by Luke, as we should expect, and they are omitted in Matthew for the same reason that they are recorded in Luke. The Christ in Luke to them will be first, of course, a "Saviour to Israel," but by him also the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. Luke is in close touch with these spiritual souls who care more for a Christ who meets deepest personal needs than for him as Matthew loves to depict him as the wonderful King setting up a "kingdom."

It is especially to be noticed that Luke writes as one who belonged to the little inner circle of which Joseph

[1] Luke i, 64. [2] Luke i, 46. [3] Luke i, 32.

and Mary and John and Elisabeth were members; a circle of friends who, after Christ had left the world, would be likely to talk over these matters about the virgin birth. His three opening chapters are employed in describing the circumstances before and after that most wonderful event. John, thinking mainly of the preexistence, will not cumber his story with details of an earthly birth. Nor will Mark, who writes with the idea of presenting the Christ to the Roman mind, be likely to mention these circumstances. These things lie completely outside the line of thought which John and Mark have selected. Even Matthew, with his idea of the Jewish royalty of Christ, will go into no very minute detail. But Luke is the physician. His studies lead him to think of life in its beginning and in its continuance. His three chapters are tender, delicate, beautiful, devout. They show him on terms of intimacy with the "holy family." He is the one to whom, next to Joseph, her husband, Mary would be most likely to speak, subsequently to the Lord's death, about the wonderful annunciation and the miraculous conception of her child, Jesus. She would tell it to Luke as the one most likely to inquire, and the one most likely to receive her confidence. And Luke is the evangelist who should tell it to the world. Those two chapters, out of place in Mark or John, are exactly in their own place in Luke's Gospel. Only the outline of the story is in Matthew. Its fullness is in Luke. And it is so told as to wake no vulgar curiosity; so told as if by one closely connected with the family circle; so

told—this is the singular impression it makes—as if he had used some of the very words, so pure and delicate, that Mary herself had employed in telling the sweet story to him. There is a touch of a pure woman's hand and heart in the story. And in his words, "as is commonly believed among us," the "us" may have referred especially to the membership of the "holy family," though the further reference may have been to the general body of Christians. The account of that birth has individuality in it. This is the report of one who was in close touch with the mother and who knew the holy secret of the virgin birth. The story is the climax of the world's literature for delicacy and purity. Its own self, like the sun's own sunshine, is evidence of its truth. If ever inspiration, it is here. Thanks be to God for Luke's narrative, with its absolute transparency and its self-evident air of perfect truthfulness! Coming from such a man, clearly in the private confidence of the parties, and recording not only the facts but what these persons thought and said and did, the whole story as related by Luke is simply the perfection of realism.

There was no need of inventing such a story—setting aside the impossibility of such an invention; no need for purpose of ritual celebration. For though all doctrine, as all fact in Christianity, hangs upon Christ's coming in some such way, yet no celebration of a natal day is demanded nor is any rite given to perpetuate the fact in the world's memory. But it was the tender, winsome story of a happy event, taken out

of the privacy of a sacred home, and given to the world when Joseph and Mary and Elisabeth saw that Luke would show forth Jesus as the wide world's Saviour.

Turn now to Matthew's story. He would show that Jesus Christ is of royal descent; he is in David's line. David was the poet-king of the Hebrew nation. His son, Solomon, was the king whose success in art, in letters, and in wisdom had made him famous throughout the oriental world. Among the tribes the tribe of Judah was the royal one. The ten tribes in Christ's day had not been regathered. They were as lost then as now. Two tribes only had returned from the Captivity, Judah and Benjamin. Until a little time after Christ's death these tribes kept their registers apart; so that, while there was the popular name of "the Jews" for both, it could be clearly known that a given man was really a Jew, a descendant of the tribe of Judah. But from the time of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem these family registers are not to be found. No Jew on earth to-day can show that he is not a Benjamite rather than a Judahite. It is impossible to trace now anything like a royal descent from David. That descent could have been shown in Christ's day. All persons had been obliged by Roman law to enroll themselves for "the taxing" according to their tribes. Jesus Christ came when his pedigree could be known. Hence the very great importance attached by Matthew to the list, as shown in his quotation not only of the names, but of the very peculiar way

of numbering, by "fourteen generations." It was a kind of popular Jewish mnemonics.

In connection with these records the evangelists Matthew and Luke assert that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and Luke is very specific as to the accompanying circumstances. Luke's statement about the birthplace has been questioned on the ground of alleged discrepancies of date as well as place. He has been accused of placing a census ordered twelve years after Christ's birth, under Quirinus, at a time when, historically, it did not occur, and when Quirinus was not the census maker. Luke associates the two events, a census and the birth of a child, and asserts also that, under a Roman census, the Jewish method of taking it was employed—both of which things it is alleged are unhistoric. The fact, also, that our Lord was known as Jesus of Nazareth rather than as Jesus of Bethlehem, has been taken as an additional reason for distrusting Luke's story of his birthplace.

But all these considerations, founded as they are upon negations, while they do not disturb the believer, have started investigations which in the end have been reassuring. That a census was ordered under Quirinus, A. D. 6 or 7, is admitted. But what if this occurred in the second term of Quirinus's governorship? His first term synchronized with Herod's last years. Suppose this to be the actual order of events: Augustus issues a decree for a universal enrollment on a systematic plan; this enrollment is to take place periodically—exactly as we now know the Roman en-

rollment in Egypt to have been periodical, for every fourteen years. This enrollment is what Luke names. But the object, as we know, was that "all the world should be taxed." The actual enforcement of the general order for "all the world," occurred in Palestine at the time of our Lord's birth. The general system of periodic enrollment established by the Roman emperor was the basis of the Jewish national enrollment under Herod. This general system had its series of enforcements, and "the first" of them is the one described so carefully by Luke, who tells us when and how it was put in force in Syria. He mentions at the outset the universal Roman decree, and then he carefully proceeds to describe one of the periods when the subordinate province undertook the execution of it. And Luke's extreme accuracy is further shown when we find him describing, not the Roman method of procedure attempted afterward and recorded by Josephus as "the great census" rousing a rebellion, but a previous census carried out in the Jewish form by tribal enumeration—a clear concession to Jewish feeling. Luke carefully explains this provincial arrangement. To do this by household was not the usual Roman method; but the same end was secured with less friction and with no great hardship, when employed in a small country like Palestine, where tribal feeling was strong and tribal enumeration was easy, and where the people were accustomed to annual religious gatherings, such as the Passover, etc. The intimations that Luke has here made some mistake

are evidently groundless, and only serve to call attention to his broad and yet exact knowledge of all the facts.

Nor can any doubt be thrown upon the place of our Lord's birth because of the phrase "Jesus of Nazareth." His abiding in Bethlehem was only for a little time; his home and his parents' home for many years was in Nazareth. History has its noble names recalled not so much by the place of birth as by that of residence. How could he have been known by any other name than "Jesus of Nazareth" when the term "Jesus of Bethlehem" would have been held to describe another person than he? His years, until ripe manhood, were passed in the upland village of Galilee, from which place "his fame went forth," and the historic fact, so far from being periled, is the rather made prominent; since in any general record of his life a careless narrator would have put down his birthplace and that of his long residence as one and the same. The conclusion, then, is that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but became known to the world from the city, out of the privacy of which he emerged into his public life, as "Jesus of Nazareth."

But in Matthew's Gospel, following the annunciation of his birth at Bethlehem, we have a book written about a single idea: Jesus Christ is King. Matthew begins with the kingly descent. He has the Jews of his own day in mind. He knows that the great outside world would care very little, but that the inner Jewish world would care very much for the direct and positive

proof on this one point, so essential to them in all their ideas of the true Christ.

At the outset he will meet all questions by his genealogical lists. In the first Christian century, in controversy with the Jews, this was immensely important. Joseph must be registered as Mary's husband, his name taking the place of hers in public documents. But he was also of royal descent. This man Joseph is "of the house and lineage of David."[1] For the first thirty years, in meeting Jewish objectors, this was an important fact. If Matthew had cited the tables wrongly the error would have been seized upon by objectors. But here was Joseph's name in the family registers of Luke, showing him in the Abrahamic line, and also in Matthew's list, showing him to be in the Davidic or kingly line. Jesus stood on the public records of the Jews as legal heir of Joseph. The two genealogies, that of Luke and that of Matthew, are genealogies of Joseph as the two appeared on the

[1] In a copy of the recently discovered Syriac version of Matthew's Gospel a blundering effort has been made to change the words, Matt. i, 16, "Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ," into "Joseph (to whom was espoused the virgin Mary) begat Jesus who is called Christ." So, too, verse 25, which reads, "She brought forth a son," is changed to "she bare him a son." The object evidently was to favor opposers who claimed that the birth of Jesus was natural. But the blunderer left unchanged the eighth verse, which reads, "found with child of the Holy Ghost"—a flat contradiction to the change the objector had made. So, too, he retains the nineteenth verse, which tells us that "Joseph was minded to put her away." Of course, had the birth occurred in natural generation, that would have been an act without a motive. The one changed manuscript serves rather for curiosity than inquiry. But it also shows (1) the motherhood conceded; (2) the question of fatherhood discussed in a narrow circle; (3) a tendency to seek for a perfect humanity in Christ as necessary to the idea of completeness in him; (4) that any alteration of the evangelical accuracy would be so out of harmony with the story as a whole that it surely would be detected.

registration tables. His name on these rolls as her husband would represent her name. But Mary was the daughter of Jacob and so was cousin to Joseph, afterward her husband.[1] Thus in fact there is a double royal descent in "the Joseph family." Family heirs and royal heirs, in a way not unknown to modern history, come together again, their descent traced in different ways, in the one "holy family" at Nazareth.

All through his Gospel Matthew sees the kingly in Jesus. Incidents not bearing on this regal idea are either omitted or barely noticed, while occasionally even the order of time is forgotten in so massing the events in an effective grouping that every reader may see the kingship of the Lord. He is the evangelist who tells of John as a forerunner. A forerunner[2] heralds a king. He is the evangelist who sees Christ as a king overcoming the king of evil in the Temptation.[3] Matthew's great phrase is "the kingdom" and "the kingdom of heaven." He is at especial pains to

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[1] "In the public registers Jesus could only appear as Joseph's son (comp. John i, 45). In transferring them to the pages of the Gospels the evangelists only add the qualifying expression "as was supposed" (Luke iii, 23; Matt. i, 16). They are both genealogies of *Joseph;* that is, of Jesus Christ as the reputed and legal son of Joseph and Mary. The genealogy of St. Matthew is Joseph's genealogy as legal successor to the throne of David; the successive heirs of the kingdom ending with Christ as Joseph's "reputed" son. St. Luke's is Joseph's private genealogy, exhibiting his real birth. One evangelist shows the heirs to David's throne, the other exhibits the paternal stem of Him who was the heir. This explains the anomalies of the two pedigrees, and shows their agreements as well as their discrepancies, and the circumstance of there being two genealogies. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was in all probability the daughter of Jacob (the "Jacob" mentioned in the list) and first cousin to Joseph, her husband. So that in point of *fact,* though not of *form,* both genealogies are as much hers as her husband's."—Smith, *Student's New Testament History.* p. 163.

[2] Matt. ii, 1. [3] Matt. iv, 1, 11.

record the instances in which our Lord directly claims authority. He gives the scene with the Twelve; also that in which Christ made the claim before the people. He shows how the Messiah "must needs have suffered;" for the evangelist has in mind the Jewish idea that the Messiah should not suffer, and he will show the Jews, from their own Scriptures, their mistake. Matthew is the one who, as might be expected, dwells, in his twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters, on the royal second coming of Christ, at which as King and Judge, he shall assemble all men for the final account. Its first words are, "Jesus Christ, son of David," its last regal words are, "Lo, I am with you unto the end of the world;" and in all between the opening and the closing words there are set forth the kingly miracles, the kingly promises, the kingly resurrection, the kingly commission of the disciples and the kingly return of the Lord. In short, the whole Gospel is the story of a King, Jesus Christ.

It will not be needful to show why Mark, writing for the Roman world, did not give special prominence to the ideas which govern both Matthew and Luke. The Roman world would not care for the tables that the other evangelists give with such exactness. But there was one thing which would attract the Roman. The world's master was Cæsar. Mark would present Jesus Christ as the Master of another kind of empire. Mastery anywhere drew Roman attention. In his care for the Roman readers he stops to translate any unfamiliar term into words they would immediately recog-

nize. He is short, swift, incisive. He delights in any imperative word or deed. He omits long discourses. He is graphic; writing in the present tense, as an eye-witness. This is so evident that his Gospel has the air of being dictated mainly by Peter. His persistence in looking upon the resurrection from the Roman point of view is significant. He details the share of the Roman power in all the incidents of the death and the resurrection. He is the evangelist who records those last imperative words—words that breathe mastery and victory—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned."[1] In Mark, from first sentence to last, Jesus is the manly and masterful Christ.

John differs from all the others in his aim and method. He assembles his material about the idea of a divine Christ who had been a temporary visitant to earth from heaven. There was no reason why he should so much as name the virgin birth. It was out of his view. It was not unknown, but altogether aside from his aim. It would have been out of his line for him to write one word about it. His whole Gospel is conceived along another line of thinking. He is intent on the preexistence of his Lord. The earthly life, glorious as it is, is but incidental. He is depicting the heavenly Christ of the dateless birth. His Christ is outside the limits of time. The great thing was his preexistence "before the world was." He had always

[1] Mark xvi, 15-18.

been "with God." He "was God."[1] The whole Gospel is Christ's humanly divine and divinely human heart laid bare. He is with men a little time. He quickly resumes his own native heaven. John's Gospel is the Gospel of the "Son of God." It fitly comes after the others, completing the series. John will say little that they have said. He knows the story of the early life as well as Matthew and Luke, for they have written it out before he writes his Gospel. He has no call to tell it again. He names John, but John is not "John the Baptist" to him; John is only a "witness" to Christ.

But his incidental words show his knowledge of the virgin birth. His theme is the Son of God become the Son of man. "The Word was made flesh."[2] It was not a process of addition. It was not God and man. It was not a man manifesting God. It was not God absorbing or even enwrapping man. It was God becoming man; "made flesh." He thus assumes that the virgin birth is well known, just as he assumes a knowledge of parables that he does not mention in detail. It is the same with miracles, which to him are simply "mighty works." He supplies the teaching that went with the parables and miracles which the others, in their aims, had been led to record. He supplements not only their plan with his plan but their few words with his many. He will show Christ doing more at his death than at his birth. Luke's two chapters about the beginning are paralleled by John's ten chapters about

[1] John i, 1, 2. [2] John i, 14.

the closing of the Lord's life. "The only begotten Son" had "been made flesh" to show himself more divine in death than in life; on the cross than in the manger. Others have named Bethlehem, he will name Calvary. He speaks of a marvel of "the beginning" greater than the virgin birth named so specifically by Matthew and Luke; a marvel, too, of the closing days of the Lord, which is more supernatural than the miraculous advent of Jesus when he visited these mortal shores.

Thus it is clear that the omission of specific details concerning the virgin birth by two of the evangelists is warranted by their aim in composing their Gospels. Such mention should not be expected by them. Such mention would be forced and unnatural; would even be suspicious in John and Mark, while its absence would be impossible in Matthew and Luke. Enough now to notice that the omission for good and sufficient reasons by Mark and John does not impair in the least the credibility of the two evangelists who are the very ones expected to record it; the ones who, omitting to record the lineal and the regal descent and the details of that wonderful birth, would have left us in a strange surprise. Doubt would have been awakened. Immense difficulties would have been felt, not only by Jewish converts in the earliest Christian centuries, but in all subsequent centuries, by those who crave a fair degree of completeness in their conception of the way in which the Son of God became the Son of man.

It has been intimated that, as elsewhere the wish is

sometimes the father to the invention, so it might have been here; that each of these two evangelists would feel the need of answering the questions sure to be asked, because of his peculiar point of view, about the birth of this Jesus for whom so much was claimed. Sooner or later every man who should read the story of the subsequent life would ask about its beginnings. How did he come to us? What of his parentage? How did he pass his earlier years? Objectors would ask, and converts would also inquire. And we may be sure that this demand for knowledge concerning the birth of Jesus would lead the two men who were best able to conduct a careful investigation, because of their previous training and employments, to examine the sources of the evidence. And they were near enough to those who knew the original secret. The special care of Matthew as he explains the "fourteen generations," and of Luke as he brings together the order of events in the separate stories of Elisabeth's child and of Mary's child, shows the painstaking work of the evangelists. The whole air and aspect of the story by Luke, its purity and delicacy, the motherly touches in the words of the older saint and in those of the virgin at the annunciation, the whole combination of circumstances at the temple and at Nazareth, the unique birthplace and the political reason that secures the presence of Mary and Joseph at Bethlehem, and all the story of that wonderful boyhood—the invention of all these things and the weaving of them into one harmonious story, is as evidently beyond Luke or

any other Jew of his time as would be the making of a world.

Let us examine the recorded story: Luke's prologue is very significant. Has he in mind his own three opening chapters when he uses the words "a perfect understanding from the first"? Has he an especial emphasis on these incidents of the virgin birth when he speaks of the things "believed among us"? Has he reference to Mary's disclosure to him when he would "set the things in order;" when, also, he speaks of consulting "eyewitnesses"? Does he mean that his testimony is for the logical faculty in its demands, and also for the soul, which must have its satisfactions? But he may mean more than this; namely, that the self-evident power of the facts is matched by the self-evident inspiration of the records.[1]

It is the year 748 A. U. C.; six years before our Christian era began. In the priestly course of Abia, a man, Zacharias by name, had been selected by lot to do weekly service in burning incense upon the altar in the holy place. He was about sixty years of age, and his home with his wife, Elisabeth, was in a quiet country town in Palestine. They were both, as Luke tells us, well known and largely esteemed for devoutness and uprightness and blamelessness in all duty. The age of the man, his whole character, his office, his reputation among friends and neighbors all forbid the

[1] Paul and Luke were at one time companions in spreading the gospel. Luke's facts were thus known to Paul. So that the two men are mutual in their testimony to the world.

idea of undue excitement, of self-deception, and of attempted fraud. In the story, names, dates, places of abode, and official stations are all given. Had there been any mistake, let alone anything like falsehood, there was abundant opportunity in the immediately succeeding years to point out the incorrectness of his statements. Luke's narration is that of a man who sets down the facts from Zacharias's own lips. And this is the story of Zacharias. He had stood one morning in October at the altar in the Holy Place. The glowing coals were on it. The signal was given. The cloud rises about him. The other priests have gone down the platform steps and are prostrate with the people before God. Suddenly an angel appears, seen by himself, if hidden from others by the veil of smoke. He describes the positions where he stood and where the angel stood. The celestial visitor tells him of a child to be born in his home. The vision is not at all in the line of his thought as he stands there in the act of performing, it may be for the first time in his life, this holy duty. Nothing suggests it. The visitor promises a boy. The boy will receive a peculiar name. He will be widely known—a thing Zacharias could not have imagined in his secluded life. The child shall be a Nazarene from his birth. He will be an Elijah. He will receive, not by any subsequent endowment, as had the prophets, but from the outset of life, the measure of the Holy Spirit as large as God can give to man. He will precede the Messiah and prepare the way before him. But Zacharias is in no credulous

mood. In the long previous years he may have wanted a son for himself, but this promised son for "all Israel" is not the home-child he had desired. Surprised, bewildered, he cannot believe his own ears. He asks a sign of this thing—and receives one that is in part a penalty for his unbelief, in part a remarkable testimony to all the people. He goes to the steps to do his next duty, that of pronouncing the benediction on the prostrate worshipers, but his tongue fails him. He can only make signs that he has seen a vision in the Holy Place. And the people understand that the pious priest, whom everybody trusts, has received a revelation that he cannot yet communicate to men. He goes out, goes home, and in seclusion spends the following months.

If we look closely at the whole story its general impression is favorable. The incident of the angel is of course supernatural. So Zacharias thought, and so thought Luke when Zacharias told him, and when the evangelist calmly set it down in the forefront of his Gospel. Unless a man assumes as a rule for himself that the supernatural shall under no circumstances have his belief, he must see that the aged priest's testimony ought to receive credence. The only reason for setting the testimony aside is that the facts are wonderful. But in a world of wonders, millions of which, though inexplicable, are believed in as facts by every sane mind, that objection is of little weight. If, as prophecy declared, there was to be a forerunner for the most wonderful of all persons, the Messiah of God,

then the fact that the forerunner should have some preparatory mystery about his birth is not unreasonable. Not an iota of evidence has ever been alleged against the incident, and it stands as the fit introduction to what follows.

In the little town of Bethlehem, a few months after the events above named, there was a birth, the circumstances of which were so exactly out of accord with all Jewish ideas and teachings and expectations that no Hebrew mind could have imagined them.[1] To a virgin had appeared one of God's chief angels. Her home was at Nazareth and she was espoused to one Joseph, who, though, like herself, of royal lineage, was living in a home as far removed from poverty as from wealth. The annunciation was made to her that she was to be the mother of "the Messiah." She hesitates. She fears. This thing was in no line of expectation with her. She was told of the overshadowing of the Highest and of the Holy Spirit as coming to her. Her child is to be the "Son of the Highest." She retires in maidenly modesty, finds Elisabeth, and they in divine joyfulness and happy confidence, tell each other of all that has occurred. Those who have known the oriental freedom which has in it neither prudery nor yet undue license in such matters, will not wonder

[1] "It has often been attempted to throw discredit on the story of our Lord's supernatural origin by comparing it to the heathen stories of how sons of the gods were born of mortal mothers; but, first, such an idea was utterly repugnant to the Jewish conception of God and could not spring up on Jewish soil; and, secondly, even these stories, poured forth from the heathen mind, were indications of a deep sense in humanity of the need of the Incarnation."—Stalker, *Life of Christ*, p. 156.

at the unbosoming of the details by these women to each other, nor at the story of the interview as given in all delicacy by the physician and evangelist Luke. Whatever our Western ideas and the severer restrictions of our century might impose on the narrative, if the story were to be written to-day, this is asserted by those whose knowledge of Eastern life makes their testimony of worth: that the narrative is within the bounds of delicacy as understood when Luke penned his opening chapters. And the mothers of all ages and of all lands, Eastern and Western, have turned to the tender story of the salutations of the two women, and have agreed in the praise of their pure and reverent words. The songs of both the women are true Hebrew songs, alike in form and spirit. They help us to feel the reality of the position. Such songs could have been sung only on Hebrew soil and by the hallowed lips of pure Hebrew women. A hint of Joseph's surprise is given. He is at first incredulous, but he yields to the evidence, and instead of putting Mary away he holds her in all purity, and his name and hers at length are recorded as husband and wife. The witnesses agree. Zacharias and Elisabeth and Joseph and Mary meet and mingle their testimony before the holy Child is born. Mary is sheltered in the tender care and love of those who know the facts.

There was another consenting circumstance. That a Roman emperor should order an enrollment in order that he might levy a tax is not a thing unknown outside of sacred story. That it should extend to Pales-

tine is not incredible. And, further, that the officials of Palestine should take their own Jewish methods of registration, by tribes, is exactly in accord with the policy of the empire, which was to not unduly offend provincial feeling. The Roman law required registration in one's "own city;" the Hebrew custom added enrollment by "tribe" or clan, and also by the ancestral "house" or "lineage." Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem, betrothed at the time, and afterward, at the point of time of the gospel story, they are legally husband and wife.

The careful narrative makes each of these things distinct. For they are parts of the rapidly accumulating evidence. Another item must be noted. In the far East astrology has been from time immemorial a favorite study. We need not think of it, as it is to-day, associated with fraud and fortune telling. It was really an astronomy in its primal form. Men studied the starry volume as we the printed page. Tradition held the world's steady belief to the idea that stars heralded the birth of great men, and that when the "divine Man" should come a new star would grace the sky. That God should use so venerable a tradition, not wholly, it may be, without his own indirect inspiration, is what we might expect. The world's selectest students needed in their own line a testimony from God to the advent of his Son. A new star seen by the "wise men of the East," shining low in the western air, was God's way of giving the expected sign. The story of the visit of the Magi is simple, direct, unmis-

takable. It alleges an occurrence which, if true, was a public fact, and which, if unhistoric, could have been shown to be false. Had there been any fraud, quick-sighted enemies would not have failed to show that no such arrival had taken place. Nor would their confutation have been allowed to perish from the literature of objection. These men follow the supernatural star—a star seen, it may be, only by themselves. Its light guides them to Jerusalem, where their visit alarms the king. The light leads them onward and falls lower over a town, lower yet, over a single building in Bethlehem.

In contrast with the visit of the Magi from the East, whose intellectual search prepared them for the advent, was that of a little company of plain men within a mile of the little village. Not less earnest were these shepherds than those wise men. The God whose Holy Spirit moved on the minds of distant students, wrought on the hearts of these nearer men, who were waiting and watching for the "Shepherd King" of Hebrew prophecy. As those by "a star," so these by the more Judean idea of "angels" are visited by Him who uses the varied expectations he rouses in men's minds and hearts. How beautiful the variety of these manifestations which prepared for the Christ who should span all widest differences and unite all greatest contrasts, thus meeting the needs of all classes, from the scholarly Magi to the pious but untaught shepherds. To all the diversities of men, he, in his diversity, is the One sent of God.

"In quiet ever and in shade
Shepherd and Sage may find;
They who have bowed untaught to Nature's sway
And they who follow Truth along her star-paved way."

Plain men with large hearts and cultured men of wide mental demand were both to be satisfied of the new fact and then to give their testimony to the world. Angels are to one what the star is to the other. It is to be noted that the words of the angel song are according to the Hebraic conception of that period. What invention would have put into angelic lips in the next century may be imagined from the puerilities of the Apocryphal Gospels. The angel tone is true to the whole event of the Incarnation. The form of the song is simple, but its scope is as wide as earth and heaven. The grand chorus fits the theme, the time, the occasion, the purpose. From its "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will," nothing can be taken without loss and nothing added with any gain. It has the simplicity of unrivaled fullness. And so it comes about that the angels' song and the shepherds' visit give us another happy attestation in that accumulating series of events which divine care has furnished to human inquiry.

The incident of the virgin birth of the Holy Child whose cradle is the manger is a touch that, while going to the world's heart, has in it, as the story is told, an air of reality. The crowded inn, the visit of shepherd and Magi, the contrasts between the adorations and the surroundings, the meeting of extremes in outward

circumstance so befitting the extremes which find expression when the Son of God becomes the Son of man—these make up the wondrous fact. Was it not intended, in the action and interaction, in the singleness of these conspiring circumstances and yet their happy blending in the virgin birth, that there should be a self-evident testimony like that which, again and again, afterward, in our Lord's earthly career, compelled notice and produced conviction?

And these facts make a double appeal. They speak to both the reason and the heart. Both parts of our nature, in their united action, are to be met and satisfied. If a man shall refuse to consider that the heart has its demand as well as the logical reason, is he really logical? Is there not the morally logical as well as the intellectually logical? And in the union of the two, each helpful to the other, do we not find the only complete satisfaction in questions like that before us now? Both these witnessing lines meet in their testimony to the virgin birth. Considered apart they are weighty evidence, taken together they are convincing proof.

And there is another aspect of the story which, if it may not add to the proof, is of the nature of an answer to objectors. It is sometimes said that the virgin birth and its attendant incidents are miraculous; as if the miraculous was therefore to be dismissed instantly as unworthy of credence. But the singular thing about Luke and Matthew is that they do not use the word miracle in this connection. That a fact is miraculous

is always and everywhere merely inferential. It is merely deduction from the fact. So that proof, not a whit more or less, is required as to the facts themselves. It is not the miracle that is to be proved, but the facts. Subsequently, there is a wholly separate question. It is the question of whether the facts are or are not of a character to be classed under the head of the miraculous. The proof of the reality of the facts does not depend at all on the further and wholly distinct inquiry as to whether they are human, angelic, diabolical, or divine in their origin. True, we may think it worth while, in some cases involving immense interests to large numbers of people, to examine with more care the evidence offered in proof; and this not because more evidence is required, but because of the larger interests at stake. A thing cannot be more than proved, however important it may be to mankind at large or to any individual of the race. It is characteristic of the scientific method to be as exact in examining the minute as the large. Facts are facts, and require only proof that they are facts, no matter what inferences follow from them.[1]

[1] "I have not the slightest objection to offer *a priori* to all the propositions in the three creeds. The mysteries of the Church are child's play compared with the mysteries of nature. The doctrine of the Trinity is not more puzzling than the necessary antinomies of physical speculation; virgin procreation and resuscitation from apparent death are ordinary phenomena for the naturalist. It would be a great error to suppose that the agnostic rejects theology because of its puzzles and wonders. He rejects it simply because in his judgment there would be no evidence sufficient to warrant the theological propositions, even if they relate to the commonest and most obvious everyday propositions."—Letter of Huxley, quoted in *Incarnation*, Gore, p. 266. So that while the greater wonders in nature can be proved, the smaller wonders in religion cannot be! God can bring about facts that men will call miraculous; but he cannot give proof of them which shall be credible!

With the detail characteristic of Luke in the story of the early life we have the singular scene of the presentation in the temple. It was an act of obedience to the Hebrew law. Here again comes out a corroboration of the mystery that meets us at every stage of the Incarnation. Over against the lowliness seen in the humble offering and in the purchase money paid by the mother as the "redemption" for her firstborn child is the significant prophecy by Simeon, "He shall be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Israel." This spiritual man, by special illumination, discerns the holy fact. It is not told us that he was in Mary's confidence. The tone of the statement looks the other way. The reasoning by which the soul finds its satisfactions is as swift and sure as that of the logical faculty. And yet that the Babe, though without external signs to a stranger eye, should have impressed so profoundly a venerable and devout man is due to the divine side of a fact the human side of which was a mere child presented for the usual purification. The people believed in signs, and God met them by a sign which the more spiritual men who frequented the temple must have known, and which they, as did his mother, must have "hid in their hearts." Then follows the childhood, with the journey to Egypt and the return; the boyhood at Nazareth, with the visit to the temple; at each point the wide contrast of one fact set over against the other in the strange years of waiting for his public mission. The details are not abundant; but there are devout students to-day who

magnify the tokens of the divine, and there are those who emphasize the marks of the human nature. Jesus, afterward in active service, was then in submission. He was waiting.

Here, as well, perhaps, as at any other place in our discussion, we may stop over the alleged limitations of our Lord's nature by his humanity. Such limitations have been urged as coming from his childhood, from his manhood, from his earthly surroundings, and from his official relation to his Father. These limitations have been asserted as existing in the very nature of things, and as confirmed by some of his own declarations about his own lack of knowledge, at certain times, concerning events that a divine Being must necessarily know. As these questions bear, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, on the special point of our inquiry—the reality of the virgin birth—they crave a few words of notice. Only let this be always kept in mind, that we study the mystery of the Incarnation. The inquiry about the other alleged limitations will help us when we return to our specific question.

1. The impressions of the virgin mother herself are of worth. She knew the secret of his birth. She seems, however, to have held it for a time, in some partial obscurity through her human mother-love. His subjection to his legal parents carries with it their assertion of authority over him. Yet, always, as against this, is her treasuring the other series of facts "in her heart." Her treatment of him as a human

child is the impression we gain from the record of the evangelists. True, she was liable to mistake, as one who was human herself. Her own sinlessness is not anywhere intimated, nor is her sinlessness needed to assure the sinlessness of her Son, any more than is her mother's sinlessness required to assure Mary's sinlessness; let the miracle of sinlessness be placed where the Scriptures place it—at his birth. Nevertheless her impressions about her child have value, and they are not by any means exclusively in the one or the other direction. Did she feel differently at different hours? Did she tell Luke, after the birth of her Son, and only in a fragmentary way, of her impressions, and did he set them down as she gave them—neither Luke nor Mary attempting any full theory of him in his childhood?

2. The impression made by his subsequent life on the general public is to be considered. There are a good many hints and some positive declarations about this popular estimation. For opponents let us not care; but a great number of men at different times and in a general way followed him and listened to him. Some came for his miracles, some for his teachings, and some thought him a new "prophet;" some hoped he was the harbinger of the Messiah. The impression was that of uniqueness in his character and mission. Many could not make him out. He seemed, as indeed he was, a mystery. For such was his position in the work prescribed by his Father that this apparent suppression was necessary; and this idea of him as not

yet fully revealed, as one to be better known farther on, may be set down as the general impression he left on the fair-minded Jews of his day.

3. His own disciples had also a varying estimate of him. His words grew more full about his own nature and mission as the three eventful years went by. It is not necessary, as some have done, to mark the time when they all passed into any full recognition of him. The general company of believers doubtless varied in their estimate as the years succeeded each other. To the select few, the inner circle of the apostles, the revelation seems to have been larger. Peter had an hour of vision when he exclaimed, "Thou art the Son of God." The degree of the revelation seems to have been governed by the receptivity of the hearer; the woman of Samaria getting a declaration of who He was that spoke to her before some in the outer circle. The impression is, again, that of mysteriousness. These disciples appear to be drawn by an indefinable personality. They plainly treated him as a man, and, as plainly, he was more than man to them. His experience was clearly to them that of a person with a single consciousness. It is not in evidence that he left any impression of a consciousness in which in one class of experiences he was divine, in another human. His followers seem never to have thought of him as two persons—sometimes one and sometimes the other. He left on them the impression that he was one Person, with one consciousness at all times. True, their reading of their Lord may not have been that of sinless

persons or of persons perfect in knowledge, though so near to him. And yet their estimate is of worth.

4. Our Lord's own estimate of himself might be gathered from certain utterances; yet these are occasionally overborne by others of a totally different kind. Are these due to his position rather than to his own nature? Some of them may be so considered, as when, after declaring his oneness in nature with God, he proceeds immediately to describe his official relation, in which he says, "My Father is greater than I." But one thing is clear even in these utterances, that Jesus is one Person. So, too, there are apparent limitations of mission and apparent limitations coming from different parts of his mission as he suits himself to them. A universal Saviour, he was apparently limited in his personal ministry to a single nation. It was not as if he had been born and done his work in cosmopolitan Rome. He was sent only "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," but, though a Jew, he is world-wide in his precepts; founding them upon God's providence to all men and his sending out his gospel to "every creature." Restricted in position, his unrestricted promises ring out to "whosoever will." He spoke out of fullness and left the impression that he himself felt that more was to follow. The disciples, after he should leave them, were to preach a gospel more complete in some respects than he had preached.[1] He felt, evidently, that the mission of his personal life was narrower than himself.

[1] John xvi, 12.

Just the line of Christ's personal consciousness in childhood and manhood we can never fully understand. It is a fact before which we bow in all humility and reverence. He was fully known only by the Father, as the Father was fully known only by the Son. It might even be held that he only so far declared himself as he needed to do in each new position; waiting until "after he should suffer," so that he might come again as "the Lord, the Spirit" to say the "many things" he could not say about himself during his life. The reserve of his utterance about his own consciousness is a remarkable feature in his earthly teachings.

5. Of very great importance is the impression made by the sacred records on the Christian centuries as they have studied the story of Jesus. We will keep in mind our specific subject—the virgin birth of our Lord—but the whole life bears on the question of its beginning. The profound impression upon the ages of his whole career, made up as it is of a birth that so fitly introduces such a unique childhood and is followed so fittingly by so wonderful a manhood, is manifest. These show breadth rather than narrowness, extension rather than limitation, fullness of adaptation rather than scantiness of moral measure.

It is a well-known principle in passing judgment on any man illustrious in human history, that we grant him our praise as he excels not only in one thing but in many; and the man who reconciles harmoniously the widest extremes and unites happily the most

opposite excellencies is really the greatest character. In the resolutions presented to the American Congress at the death of Washington it was said, "He was first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." It was much to be "first in war," when every private felt that he could command an entire army. It was much to be "first in peace" when, at the close of the war, every man had his own plan for establishing a government. It was even more to be "first in the hearts of his countrymen" when so many deserved the plaudits of the new nation. But to excel at the same time in each of these respects, and to assemble and combine them all in one great character—that was the greatest of achievements and deserving of the utmost praise a nation could give. So in judging of the moral heroes of sacred story we give praise to the men whose largeness covers diverse qualities. And the impression that Jesus makes on the ages is that of a breadth that gathers unto itself all excellencies. Held before to be so far apart that the distance could not be spanned, yet, in some inexplicable way, these glories have been perfected, exhibited, and blended in him.

We find him born of humanity, laid in a manger, knowing the wants of life exactly as we know them. He needed sleep to refresh him, and food to nourish his body; and looking on these things alone, one would say that he was a man; indeed, the apostle calls him "the man Christ Jesus." But the facts pointing toward another conclusion are not less evident: he is called

"the Mighty God," "the Everlasting Father."[1] "By him were all things made."[2] And every work ascribed to the Father is also ascribed to the Son. Looking at these things alone, one would say that he is the very God. But the most remarkable thing is the strange way in which these facts are set over against each other, presenting us with a character so thoroughly at one with itself that instead of discord there is a kind of lofty harmony. Though his first lowly bed is a manger, yet in the name of their God bright angels announce his birth. Though a mere child, yet a star, unseen before, guides inquiring sages to his humble abode. He submitted as a man to be baptized, but while emerging from the sacred stream there came a voice from heaven saying "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased."[3] In the wilderness he hungered, and then, when a little time had gone, he fed assembled thousands with the bread of miracle. He rested his aching head on a hard pillow in a rude fishing boat, but when awakened he bade the wind be still, and the sea to cease its raging, and they obeyed. He walks a weary journey, and just before its end he raises from the dead the son of the widow of Nain. He wept at the tomb of Lazarus, but he raised him from the grave—offering the prayer of submission in the same breath with the word of command. To his disciples he gave constantly the proofs of his humanity, and yet he said, "Before Abraham was, I am," and he urged that no inferior honor be given to himself than

[1] Isa. ix, 6. [2] John i, 3. [3] Matt. iii, 17.

to his Father, God. He wept in Gethsemane, but in that garden was performed one of the last miracles of his life. Upon the cross he uttered the language of humanity in commending his mother to a disciple's care, but he turned to the dying thief and spoke for him a pardon which none but God can bestow. He dies, but the veil of the temple is rent and the earth shudders at his expiring groan. He is buried in a human tomb, but angels guard the spot and he rises —no more to die. He walks the highway to Emmaus, but vanishes from the disciples after proof of his resurrection is given. With his disciples he climbs Olivet, but hardly is the act accomplished before he is received up out of their sight into the blue depths of the heavens. After his ascension his inspired disciples speak of him as one who learned obedience, but one in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. They tell of his manhood, and yet they invoke him in solemn prayer. They speak of his life as our example, but they commend their souls to him with their dying breath. In the baptismal formula they join his name with that of the Father, and in the apostolic benedictions they bless in the name of both. And if, as we have said, his is the greatest character who unites the widest extremes and harmonizes the greatest contrasts, then the character of Jesus is wonderful beyond all measure. And yet, in all the wonderfulness, he is never a monstrosity, but always a man—even when he is so evidently, also, more than a man.

These sharp contrasts so happily blended are the

material from which some theory of our Lord's peculiar nature must be drawn; a fact—let us keep in mind—of great value in the study of the beginnings of his Incarnation.

Let us see what we may determine as to his nature. Only four inferences are possible: If we shall say, looking on one class of facts, that he is only divine, there remain a large class of facts of which no account can be given. If we shall say, on the other hand, that he is only human, one equally large class of facts remain not included in the theory. If we shall say he was superhuman only, neither human nor divine, but in some way superior to man and inferior to God, then what becomes of both classes of facts, neither of which is accounted for in this hypothesis? These three theories of Christ's nature set aside, as not covering the facts, one more remains: that the Person whom we know as Jesus Christ was the God-man; the Son of God becoming the Son of man, "God manifested in the flesh." And this conclusion reconciles and combines both classes of texts—those which speak of him as God and those which speak of him as man. The question is not whether this is or is not explicable. We bow before it as the divine mystery. But we must not so hold the revealed fact as to make the divinity absorb the humanity, or the humanity the divinity, nor yet so as to claim a double consciousness in the one Person, our Lord Jesus Christ; nor need we hold to two natures separately existing side by side, now one acting and now the other. Yet the whole mode in

which this incarnation was accomplished must always baffle us. Human reason has no plummet that can sound the depths of God. There were those who once felt that the impassibility of God forbade any words about the divine nature as suffering. There were those who held that there could be no self-deprivation of the divine attributes, no self-renunciation of any divine perfection; not even a voluntary self-limitation. But all this was to limit God's power to limit himself, and so it actually affirmed in one direction what it denied in another. Whether it is necessary to call in the idea of self-limitation or not, some have questioned. The phrase frequently used about "the limitations of humanity" as applied to our Lord needs to be employed with great caution. God self-limited—limited by himself in the exercise of his attributes—is a widely different conception from God limited by humanity—God limited by man. Indeed, what has been claimed as limitation in the case of Christ is really extension to the conditions of men.[1] He was able to extend his being so as to become babe, child, man. He reached out and came into every variety of human experience. It may be considered as an expansion rather than a contraction, an enlargement rather than a reduction.

[1] "The objector [to the divinity of Christ because God is narrowed and restricted in incarnation as man] is denying to God the power of appearing in human form; of revealing himself in the terms of humanity. A God thus incapable would be the most impotent and useless being conceivable. He would be no God at all; he would be a mere name, and his attributes resolve themselves into negations. Greatness depends on limitations. In denying him the possibility of manifestation in limitations we reduce him to an abstract being, which is the same as nothing."—President Hyde of Bowdoin, in *Social Theology*.

It is the condescension of Divinity to care for the lowliest. Infinite greatness is shown in the greatness of care for minutest objects. Jesus was able to die, showing thereby his power; God was seen in self-sacrifice at the cross; and these were not limitations but divine extensions toward our human needs. In *The Gospel for an Age of Doubt* Dr. van Dyke has a chapter with a title that seems almost daring—"The Human Life of God." In it he sums up the New Testament teaching in this way: "1. God is not such a being, absolute, immutable, and impassible, that the Divine Logos cannot descend by a free act of self-determining love into the lower estate of human existence and humble himself to the conditions of manhood, without losing his personal identity. 2. The essence of the gospel is its declaration of the fact that this act of condescension, of self-humiliation, has actually been performed, and that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who has taken upon him the existence-form of a servant and lived a truly human life and been obedient even unto death in order to reveal to the world the saving love of God." And this newer emphasis on "the philosophy of being" by no means sets aside the older inquiries concerning the nature—the twofold nature—of Jesus Christ, who was manifested as one perfect Person. The newer conception is so far from being a substitute for the older that it only makes more of the vitality, while not setting aside in any degree the deeper ethical and the judicial relations of God to man, for which it is simply

preparatory. But the new stress laid on vitality in describing the nature of our Lord is also stress upon the fact of the divine outreach and adaptation rather than the divine limitation when God becomes man.

But the statements of alleged restriction are made, and not without some degree of plausibility, in the presence of Christ's great confession of ignorance concerning the day and hour of his second advent.[1] This, it is claimed, shows clearly a limitation of some sort. Let us suppose this to be granted. The further question is whether this is a limitation of his essential nature or simply a limitation of his position and official relation. If the latter, it is to be considered rather as an extension of himself to his work than as any limitation whatsoever. Rightly we have discarded the view that sometimes he spoke as simply and only man; as really so as if Godhead were absent. That theory attempts to explain a difficulty by creating others far harder to meet. If there be limitation here it need not be limitation by his humanity. It would at most be that other limitation—God's limitation by himself. But do we need any limitation of the divine nature in this case? Will not the limitations of position and of office go farther than any other explanation to account for his words on that occasion? Suppose we conceive of our Lord as always knowing at any time all he needed to know in his mission at that time. Was he for that moment in need of knowing about the time of his

[1] Matt. xxiv, 36; Mark xiii, 32.

second advent? If not needing that knowledge in his unique position at that hour, the limitation is not a limitation of either the one or the other nature, but solely that of a peculiar relation then borne by him. This kind of limitation—if it be proper to call it a limitation rather than, as it is in another point of view, an adaptation—will help us in looking more closely at the Lord's earliest days, those of his earliest childhood when in Mary's arms. It would be easy to cite from theologians who claim omniscience and omnipotence for Jesus, not only in babyhood but for the months just before his birth. But all this ignores the fundamental idea of adaptation to his position as child, as youth, as man. The "self-beggary" extended to the whole position he was to assume as well as to the nature he took upon himself. All he needed to know and do, as babe or as man, he knew and did; all he needed to fill out his mission, as well in the manger as in any grandest miracle, was his at that point of his work. The outreach of being needed in order to be born, to live, and to die, was shown. The amplitude to fill cradle or throne was manifested in Jesus Christ. Lord he was, but he was to be Lord in childhood, Lord in manhood, Lord in time, and Lord in eternity; as able to fill the servant's place as the Master's. The difference between condescending to become the "child Jesus" or to become the "man Jesus" vanishes when we think of the heavenly throne he left. But it is conceivable that, in both positions, he knew all he needed to know, felt all he needed to feel, and did all he needed

to do. One need only be equal to one's position, whether he be God or man; nor, so far as we can understand, is there any other rule of judging when God becomes man in Jesus Christ.

Summing up with great care the whole biblical "gospel of the Infancy," Godet, after a concise statement of the objections alleged thereto in the whole history of criticism, says: "The miraculous birth is immediately and closely connected with the perfect holiness of Christ which is the basis of Christianity; so much so that whoever denies the former must necessarily deny the latter; and whoever accepts the second cannot fail to fall back on the first, which is indeed implied in it."[1]

The event of the Incarnation, as we have seen,[2] is demanded alike by human minds and by human hearts. It involved the idea not of a newly created man, but of one to be born into our race. It involved great questions of an after-life proceeding from such a beginning. The Coming One was not to be simply a man filled in soul with the Holy Spirit, as inspired prophets had been. He must not be God in man, not man in God, not God and man, but God becoming man, in any real incarnation. He must meet these profoundest needs when he should appear.

[1] *Commentary on Luke*, p. 102. For a full, frank, comprehensive discussion of all the questions involved in the "Infancy" of our Lord the reader is referred to Godet. One need not agree at every point with him in order to feel the general completeness of his presentation and to accept his firm conclusions. Holding that the historicity of the Infancy is proved as it stands all alone, he does not fail to see how the whole Incarnation-life bears on the Incarnate birth.

[2] Chapter i.

We saw[1] also that our oldest Christian documents about the Incarnate One were the earlier Epistles of Paul; antedating thus, in documentary order, the subsequent Gospels which were to give the historical order and the more detailed story of the birth, life, miracles, teaching, death, and resurrection of the Lord. We saw how the early preachers bore oral witness to the facts in outline, and with the attending Holy Spirit multitudes of converts were gathered into the churches to which these apostles addressed their inspired Epistles. Thus the whole scope and spirit of the gospel, its inner meaning, its rich doctrinal significance, and the experiential power of the Incarnation, taken as a whole—all these were considered in their bearing on the event of the Infancy; the entire Incarnation proceeding from the event of the virgin birth.

We saw, again, in an examination of the historical Gospels, the abundance of the material from which Matthew and Luke drew their narratives; their carefulness as well as their minuteness and their comprehension; their whole tone and spirit as each for his own purposes marshaled the facts. We saw how all the elements of the problem were met in Jesus Christ. Apostolic testimony uncontradicted, the fact of the virgin birth wrought into the very substance of Christianity as was declared in sermon and Epistle, and this corroborated by evangelical narrative—these things give to the world a complete presentation of the unique character of him who was God incarnate in

[1] Chapter ii.

man. It was thus that he became one of us, and at the same time filled out the full measure of the divine idea of revealing God to us.

And the moral argument drawn from the whole broad scope of the sacred Scriptures may be considered as an addition to the special proof of the special fact of the virgin birth of our Lord. Careful students of the Scripture, taken as a whole, are profoundly impressed with the unity of the sacred volume. It has various expression of one great thought. They trace it through all the varying literature of all the long ages in which its books came to be the one Book. It may be true that it is not always and on all subjects safe to argue from the general to the specific, but, on the other hand, there are subjects on which that form of argument is not only safe but is especially pertinent and satisfactory. There are things that have in them a certain harmony with the great principles that may be under discussion, with certain great methods undertaken and great objects sought. Take, for instance, the great yearnings of the best men in their best moments for the knowledge of something beyond the finite and the limited and the changeable; for some substance that casts this finite shadow. Here in the Bible, taken as a whole, is the revelation of the infinite in an infinite God. These "infinite convictions" in us which ally us to something beyond the finite, these yearnings to lay hold of the absolute and real, and which constitute the true dignity and worth of our human nature, are the indications that somewhere and

in some One there is a satisfaction for them. They have even been cited as proof of the existence of God.[1] But now and here we claim that peculiarly in the God of the Bible—of the Bible taken as a whole—these yearnings and convictions find perfect satisfaction. For they find in the God of the Bible not only an infinite God existing, but an infinitely righteous God, and this God sending out from his heaven "Jesus Christ the Righteous." So that the three "infinite yearnings" of noblest souls in their noblest moments, these yearnings for perfect Infinitude, for perfect Righteousness, and for perfect Love in some one Being, are exactly met for these souls in this God of the Bible, and in its culminating fact of God revealed as "Jesus Christ born of a woman, born under the law." "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

It is true that careful thinkers have arrived at a belief in an infinite God apart from the scriptural Incarnation. Starting with the finite, they have eliminated, as far as the human mind can do it, the elements of time and space and of any limitation whatsoever. This is a negative approach to a negative result. They find out what God is not, and the residuum of the labored process is to them what God is. At best this

[1] "At first sight it seems extravagant to speak of man's nature as containing an 'infinite element,' but there is in us that which rises above the limits of time and space, and this is the reproduction or reflection of God's own eternal consciousness and life."—Caird, *Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, p. 179.

is only an escape from those who would argue for a denial of the divine existence. We may indeed be permitted to take that method of reply to objections. To some minds the result has its intellectual satisfactions. But there is another way that satisfies all minds and all hearts. The Bible revelations give us one God, infinite not only in being but in all attributes and all perfections. He is utterly unlike, in quantity and quality of being, the gods of the peoples surrounding the Hebrew nation. They were tribal gods; at most, national gods. He, while peculiarly the God of a chosen nation, was also God of the whole earth, from the very outset of scriptural story. Then came the steady development of the original idea of the one only God; and at length the whole grand conception gathered itself into a realization. Had it been the mere development of great and good men, the series going on would have given us, by this twentieth century, men far surpassing Jesus. But Jesus, the Incarnate One, peculiarly born, peculiarly manifested as "the Only Begotten Son of the Father," is a realization wholly unlike that of a developed human being. The unique beginning as given us by the evangelists is in harmony with the Transfiguration midway in his career, and with the Resurrection at its close. It belongs to the biblical conception. It suits the gospel story taken as a whole. The statue was cast in a single piece. The incident of the virgin birth, so far from being an excrescence, is a necessity unto any completed idea of a life with such a

career and such a mission. Without it there would be a distinct hiatus. Without it there would be a conspicuous lack, and a thousand important questions must always be unanswered. It would be hard to have any unified conception of Jesus himself, or of his career as having a beginning and a middle and an ending. It is necessary to the whole idea of Jesus as the one predicted in prophecy and described in gospel. It belongs to his life. It befits the broad conception of the Bible taken as a whole. The idea meets every variety of mind. Philosophical reasoners, dealing with idea of the infinite, need the peculiar manifestation of the Jesus born at Bethlehem, lest their whole idea should be cold and unsympathetic. Abstract thinkers need the fact of Jesus as the Only Begotten of the Father, and as one taking upon himself our human nature, that their conception should come to have the vigor of objective actuality. Plainest men, not philosophically inclined, also need it as a simple historic fact when they ask, as all men must, how Jesus came to us. And so for all students of divine truth there is the beginning of Genesis and the beginning in the Gospel. Faith receives the fact, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

The aim in these chapters has been to set forth distinctly the historic truth about the advent of Jesus Christ to the world; to show not only that there has been an Incarnation but that it was of a certain definite kind, with its fit beginning and its strongly marked

incidents which foretold a well-defined consummation; to show that specific facts of the utmost possible moral value were presented to the world, and for them not only historic but moral and spiritual belief was demanded; that, since "we have not followed cunningly devised fables," all indefiniteness and indecision are unwarranted; that the facts are facts in themselves, and are true even apart from any moral impression they may make on any man's mind and heart; that we may not "omit all question of their truthfulness or untruthfulness" and use them as we sometimes use the Greek or Roman myths—such myths considered as having a certain worth as "value-judgments" on moral questions; that now these things of the incarnate Christ are the veritable realities on which we are warranted in building our present faith and our eternal hope; that the foundations of our Christianity are not speculative, metaphysical, or yet subjective, but are objective historical facts given to us, sometimes in narrative statement, and sometimes in the alternate but equally trustworthy form of doctrinal statement, alike in Gospels and Epistles. Speculative opinion, metaphysical disquisition, and subjective experience, to have any worth, must have their foundation in Christian fact that can be historically proved. This is the logical order. We must be careful not to put buttress in the place of foundation.

Unfortunately, there are good men who look with suspicion upon all that seems to be supernatural. The Christian facts, starting with the supernatural in the

virgin birth, and proceeding with the supernatural in the works of our Lord and in his words more wonderful than his works, and showing themselves in the glories of transfiguration and resurrection, awaken in some minds a degree of distrust. But let us remember that a fact is a fact in and of itself, all apart from any inference we may draw from it as a natural or as a supernatural event. The proof of the fact is one thing, and our inference, if we draw any inference at all, is quite another. We may infer that it is simply natural. We may infer that it is supernatural. We may regard it as partly the one and partly the other. But there stands the fact all the same on its own merits, with its own proof. In the interests of clear thinking let us separate the proof of the fact from our inferences. We must have no prejudice against a fact because, in our human judgment upon it, we deem it supernatural. Nor does it throw open the door to all the alleged miracles of the subsequent centuries, if, these facts about an incarnate Christ once proved, we are obliged logically to claim that some of them clearly rise to the height of the supernatural. And we should be the more ready to cast out all prejudice against the supernatural because, in some cases, the line between the natural and the supernatural is not very easily drawn. In the case of many miracles—some would say in the case of all miracle—the supernatural is simply the natural worked more intensely; the natural side is continually evident in the Incarnation, and sometimes the supernatural side is as evident. There is the

human motherhood at the Lord's birth as well as the divine paternity. There are the five loaves and the few small fishes as well as the twelve basketfuls after the multitude have eaten. Water tends to cleanse the diseased eye, but the miracle is that the water of Siloam cures the blind man at Christ's word. It is better to dismiss all prejudice against either side, and to look fairly at the facts presented for our faith in the authenticated records of Christ's birth and career.

And there are those whose theory about "all human language as inexact" leads them to indefiniteness and distrust about the Incarnation. It is, of course, true that human language has defects and limitations, but for all the purposes of practical life it serves us a good turn. It is exact enough for a legally drawn will conveying millions of property, and for a physician's prescription when human life is at stake; for the very careful statements of science and the exact definitions of mathematics. For a man to press unduly the fact of possible error in human language is to deprive his own proposition about error of any meaning that is worthy of our consideration. That Jesus in the Gospels makes dogmatic statements, and that the apostles do the same in their Epistles, is very evident. And yet a distinguished writer, discoursing on the fallibility of human language, questions whether "Christian truth can be offered in the molds of any dogmatic statement."[1] This theory of language, as

[1] Bushnell's *Theory of Language,* as quoted by Theodore J. Munger, p. 105.

applicable to biblical language as to all other human language, leaves us in doubt about any definiteness of any word or deed of Jesus. It enables one to deny or to affirm any proposition of mental science or moral statement wherever found. Matthew and Luke, in the story of the virgin birth and of the subsequent career of our Lord, leave no doubt of their clear conception of the historic facts, and they show that they can use words definitely enough to describe their belief. All the world knows what they meant to say. Let us not, in studying the story of the Incarnation as they record it, adopt a "theory of language" that will make their record mean anything or nothing—a theory that would make any fact or truth in any department of human knowledge to become uncertain, indefinite, and uninfluential. Let us not obscure by this needless mist the wonderfully transparent story of the evangelists. God thought it worth while to send his Son in human form, and the Son of God thought it worth while to use our human language when he was with us, and he expected to be fairly understood. He promised aid to his immediate followers to lead them into all truth about what he had said, and about those "many things" he had to say unto them which they could not "bear" at that time.[1] We are not, under the specious plea of going deeper than words and deeds, to lay ourselves open to the charge of skimming the surface rather than finding the depths. If this theory of the fallibility of human language was originally devised and em-

[1] John xvi, 12.

ployed in theological discussion to escape from undesired doctrines, the fact that it has been so applied as to stultify the plain story of the Incarnation should make us hesitate to use it. The clear-cut words of the apostles when speaking of our Lord, and of our Lord himself when quoting facts and declarations found in the Old Testament Scriptures, warrant us in holding that the definite New Testament words are given us for our definite belief.

There are, again, good men who, with the best motives, as a matter of religious strategy in dealing with those who doubt, have proposed to suppress for the time, without positively denying them, the full significance and even the reality of the more objectionable Christian facts. They justify to themselves this polemical method under the persuasion that, if they can induce a man to look at some few of these facts, the power of "the personality of Jesus" will so rise upon the man's vision that he will be persuaded to "go on" and acknowledge the Incarnation in its supernatural aspects. We may honor the motive of such men, in thus seeking to defend Christianity, while distrusting their method. The danger is obvious in this polemic. To say nothing of the apparent lack of straightforwardness, sure to be detected by a shrewd objector, and the danger that he will not "go on," but will react into a denial of both the natural and the supernatural in the Incarnation, there is also, as the results have abundantly shown, the very greatest danger to the man who uses this strategy. It is al-

ways dangerous to consider truth not for truth's sake but merely as a polemic. Attempting to lift another by letting one's self down is dangerous to both. Surely, the best way to promote truth is not to suppress it. And a man easily comes to think of the part he uses as the whole of the truth itself. The habit of advocating Christianity in this way has led some good men to borrow, from a philosophy now nearly gone by, a "theory of knowledge" in which the reality of truth is suppressed by what are called "value-judgments." In other words, the truthfulness of truth is made to depend upon its value or usefulness. What it is worth for moral impression is the determining thing in seeking for the truth. Thus, all unconsciously, a man comes to believe in himself, in his own experience of the worth or usefulness of an alleged truth, rather than in the Christ who is "the Truth." These personal "value-judgments" come to be the most important thing; and, as probably no two men would agree on these "value-judgments," truth to one man is error to another; the truth itself being the shuttlecock tossed hither and yon in the logical game. "The cognitions of religion," says Ritschl, "are wholly 'value-judgments.'" So that some good men, arguing with an opponent, have even said that it is no matter what we believe about the alleged facts, say of the old Testament, if we can only get the moral impression of the story. They have said that it is no matter if Abraham never lived, or if David and Isaiah are only imaginary men; the "moral value" of the story being its worth

to us. What wonder that the opponent has sometimes turned the tables and compelled the would-be believer to own that one might waive the historic facts about Christ's life, and that good men, after using this dangerous form of apologetic in discussion about Christian doctrine, have been forced to evaporate the story of Christ in the Gospels, part after part, and treat it as only "ideally true"! They have claimed that even then, when fact has been dissolved, they could see "a great emerging Personality without any historic detail whatsoever." They would retain no incident to which any man objects. One might indeed ask, when a man proposes to get behind all the words and works of Jesus, behind all the story of the Gospels and Epistles, what there remains out of which to construct this rising Personality. All we really know of any worth about Jesus is found in these Scripture writings which it is proposed to relegate to the realm of indefiniteness. The Roman Church has done this with the real Mary, the mother of the Lord, and there has emerged an "ideal" Mary utterly unlike the Mary of the Gospels. Now, when one has dissolved either by suppression or denial, the historic Christ, what can emerge save an ideal Christ? And some have strangely claimed that this emerging ideal has drawn out their hearts toward Christ far more fervently than the "crass idea of the evangelists." But it is evident that the Christ they thus magnify and praise is not God's Christ but man's; is simply the subjective Christ of their own souls. Like the Romanist in the case of Mary, they are in

danger of worshiping their own conception; of adoring their own imagination rather than Christ. If any shred of the Christ of the Gospels remains out of which to construct this Christ, it is evident that there will be distortion in place of the glorious symmetry of the Christ of the written word. One, with Tolstoi, may build, as he does in some of his volumes, solely on the Sermon on the Mount, forgetful that this wonderful sermon is not gospel but only a grand restatement of moral law. In such a case distortion is the certain result. It is the same when one takes only the divine in Christ's career and not the human, or goes to the other extreme of taking the human and suppressing the divine; when one takes only his precept and not his doctrine; when one sees only the ethical and not the redemptive utterances and aspects. A man may make a socialistic Christ only or a philanthropic Christ only. This is the danger of all such arbitrary subjectivity. In every such case the man's Christ is not "the Christ of God." When the basal idea is the "practical effects," the "value-judgments," "the unique ideal of the Lord rising above all historic presentations of it even by the evangelists," a man is clearly drawing on his imagination for his facts. The truth of the truth rather than the usefulness of the truth is the main thing to be considered. Some one truth of the Gospels, and in some circumstances, may not be perceived to be useful at all; its worth as a "value-judgment" may for a time be very little. A man may not have come up to it yet in his growing experience. All thoughtful

Christians can recall certain doctrinal utterances of the Scriptures that, as very young Christians, they would have been glad not to have true; but middle life in its larger experience has brought them on to where these truths, once judged by "value-judgment" as useless, if not harmful, have become of greatest worth. They learned to take some facts and truths on trust and wait; and they have found the value of the things they would have discarded had not these been clearly taught by our Lord. The usefulness of a truth to a man is only a single feature of it.

But there is one thing that deserves to be considered: truth is for God's use. It is for his good as one who would reveal himself to man. By it he wishes to be understood. Truth in itself is absolute. God is truth. Jesus said, "I am the truth." Truth exists all apart from any human "value-judgment" about it, and apart from any usefulness of it to us. If the final decision about truth—this of the Incarnation, or any other—is made up "solely on one's value-judgment," then if a thing is not advantageous to a specific man he ought to reject it. Truth no more is a reality, but a subjective impression. This opens the way to an unbridled fanaticism in some minds, and, equally, to an icy intellectualism in other minds. This is to make a revelation, through outward historic fact divinely authorized in its record, not only needless but impossible. The appeal to reason for proof of fact is superseded by intellectual or moral subjectivity.

But is there no appeal to anything in us except to

the reason as it judges of outward Christian facts? Certainly; for there is the appeal, for purely ethical truth, to the intuitions God has put into our souls. To this intuitional sense of the right, expressed by the human conscience, Jesus constantly appealed. But these intuitions, native to the soul, are for ethical truth rather than for historic fact. No amount of the ethical intuition we popularly call conscience can tell us whether Christ preexisted, whether he was born in the manger, died on the cross, and rose on the third day. Here, in these distinctive Christian facts, the appeal is to the reason to take into account the historic proof of objective events. For Christianity claims to be a series of objective facts carrying with them, by an inexorable logic, certain conclusions of Christian doctrine. These doctrines are logical verities from the facts, and are exactly as veritable as the facts themselves. It may even be said that the factual statement and the exact logical or doctrinal statement are simply different ways of presenting the same thing. These Christian facts tend to awaken and strengthen the intuitions of our moral nature. There is, on one side of them, the ethical appeal to our ethical nature. But this is very far from being the all or even the main thing about our Christianity. No great fact of our historical Christianity can be settled solely or even principally by the ethical appeal. It addresses a wholly different part of our nature. If Christianity were simply a system of rational ethics touched up into new vigor by the teachings of Jesus, the appeal would be

only to our ethical instincts; but there was a thousandfold more of mere ethical teaching in the world before God sent Jesus than the world had ever practiced. Ethics, even when supplemented by the idea of God, as in the case of the Jews, only added to men's sense of sin; only added to the unbearable burden of human condemnation; only gave a "fearful looking for" of the divine judgment. The foundations of the new Christianity must be objective. In a late opinion of the Supreme Court occurs the following sentence, as true of Christianity as of science: "Civil proceedings in court are not scientific investigations, the end of which always must be objective truth."[1]

And these objective Christian facts under the power of the Holy Spirit, through our belief in them, induce what is called "the Christian experience." Set home by this Spirit, they beget Christian feeling. They give birth to Christian principle. They compel to Christian action. And, while these facts give new importance to merely ethical obligations, the great thing is that a wholly new series of distinctively Christian duties at once emerge and enter their unceasing claim on the mind and heart and life. Take the first distinguishing duty of Christianity as presented by Christ, that of belief in himself. Of course, belief is not, in itself, an ethical duty. Faith is not made a virtue in any one of the Ten Commandments. Faith is an act of the reason in the presence of truth, and, through the rea-

[1] Dowden, in his *Puritan and Anglican Studies in Literature,* quotes Richard Baxter as claiming that "the subjective certainty cannot go beyond the objective evidence."

son, an act of the soul. Something is given to be believed. The proof of Christianity as a distinguishing series of objective facts, beginning with the Incarnation, is presented to men for their faith. Thus the objective becomes, in Christian experience, the subjective. And this experience could have no reality apart from the reality of the facts which induce it. The impression on the paper is that which is made by the types. And thus, while the objective facts, in the appeal they make to the mind and heart, are the carefully laid foundations of our Christian religion, the result of believing them is the quickening and satisfaction of our natural moral instincts, and also the production of a profound Christian experience which is strengthened by added belief.

Each utterance of Jesus is a demand for faith; not a general faith, but a faith in that special truth. When at the Supper he says, "My blood, shed for many for the remission of sins," it is a dogmatic statement of atoning fact neither to be suppressed nor denied without blame. It is to be taken and believed on his authority. And when in the clearest possible language he claims that he preexisted, it is of importance that a man should not, under peril of sin against his Saviour and Master, hesitate to receive the fact on the Lord's testimony, and to give God and his only begotten Son the glory due to the Sender and to the One sent from his native heaven. When Jesus claims that he "came forth from the Father," and apostles claim that he "humbled himself," "took upon him our nature," "was

born of a woman," "the Word was made flesh, and we beheld his glory," there are but two ways of treating such testimony: that of a rejection which involves guilt, or that of a belief which is acceptable unto God.

As these facts are dwelt upon by the consecrated mind and heart they steadily grow in their evidential value. The more they are understood the more their glory is manifested to devoutly studious souls. It comes, by and by, to be seen and felt that these things of Christ's life and death, with all they involve, cannot but be true. That virgin birth so fit as the opening event of such a career, and that supernatural resurrection as the closing earthly event so correspond to each other, and that transfiguration in which for an hour, midway in his career, he resumed the glory of the upper world—these three great mountain tops of sacred events lift themselves up, and in so doing lift up also all events between them! It is Mount Washington with its neighboring mountains lifting not only all the lesser hills but exalting also all the valleys and plains that surround the ranges. These three events are in singular harmony with each other. One might almost argue from any one of them that it compels the remaining two. And each intermediate miracle has its exact location and its precise time. No miracle of the first year could possibly have occurred in the third, and no miracle of the third year could have occurred in the first. Each is timed and ordered. Each possible only where it occurs is impossible elsewhere. Teaching is carefully ordered in its progres-

sion, and is exactly coordinated with the miracle. Miracles are not massed. They stand separated in time, place, and occasion. They are never freaks of power. They are natural for a supernatural life. They are never buttresses, but always parts of the structure; and they had to be performed, as the words of the Lord had to be spoken. The roundness, the perfect symmetry, the sanity of the whole career as depicted in Gospel and Epistle for such a person as Jesus Christ, the impossibility of adding to the great events without perversion, or of suppressing them without evident distortion, the delightful sense of the completeness of that career for the obvious purpose of it, alike in its beginning and its end, in its deeds and its words, in its earthly and its heavenly manifestation—this is felt more and more as we submit ourselves to the sacred potency of the whole grand story of the Incarnation.

And they make two things very plain: First, that such a Person must have lived or he could not thus be depicted; and, second, that those who so depicted such a career for their Lord must have been divinely helped when they drew this divine picture.

HOW JESUS LEFT US.

CHAPTER IV.

Questions About the Lord's Departure.

The earthly career of our Lord in some way is to be terminated. How should he be expected to leave us? When we remember who he was and what he did we are prepared to believe that his departure would be as marvelous in its way as his advent had been. We might imagine that his Father would snatch him from the cross before it was uplifted, and that, escaping death, he would resume his native heaven. A visible ascension at the moment when Jewish hate was about to nail him to the cross, in some respects, would seem a fitting conclusion of his earthly mission. Some such ending of his career would seem to be a divine attestation and would be wonderfully significant. It would be, so we might think, the noblest conceivable form for his departure. But for this ascension to occur at the time when he was about to suffer death, though it would relieve him from the pain and shame of dying, would leave certain other most important things undone. There could have been no prayer on the cross for his murderers to thrill the world wherever the story of it is told; no example of

submission when in direst agony; no turning of the cross of shame into the cross in which disciples could glory; no humiliation of the sepulcher, affording the opportunity for the grandest of all possible triumphs in a sublime resurrection. He must die. Judging by the hate he had awakened in priest and ruler, he must die. Judging that his death, according to prophecy, had peculiar value in accomplishing man's salvation, he must die. Judging, too, by his own words to his disciples, he must die.

But, it being settled that he must die, what should follow that death? To some, a permanent rock sepulcher, with no resurrection and no ascension, is conceivable. But this leaves out other things that were to be accomplished—alike in the prediction of prophet and the fulfillment of any complete ideal of the Christ. Yet more objectionable is the conception of a grave under the rounded sod, on which for a century or two the Syrian stars should look down, and then the dust of his body become the common dust of the earth. There is no fitness, no dignity, no glory in such a conception as the earthly ending of such a life. Nor is the conception any more worthy which would have had him rise only in a spiritual resurrection—a resurrection of soul only—and, unnoticed and unknown, steal away silently into solitude and then ascend to his Father. Scarcely better is the conception which would have had him no more mortal, but evermore, in an immortal body, with men on this earth. For in that case certain things secured to us by an omnipresent

spiritual presence would be sadly lacking. A scheme of things that would take in a veritable bodily resurrection, made abundantly evidential, and certified by the best witnesses, and this resurrection life having a fair continuousness and then its completion in a further rising of his body as he ascends to his Father and his God—all this would have a certain completeness. There would be an ideal ending of the wonderful career. Nothing could be more grand than such an event in its twofold form of resurrection and ascension. In such a case God would be shown as bearing witness to the exalted character of his Son; there would be the divine testimony to his deeds as wrought in God; and as his body should rise into the serene heavens there would be visible divine acceptance. The whole world would be directed in its gaze to the heaven whither he had gone. All he had done and all he had said would receive new emphasis, and the ideal would be the actual Christ.

Let us begin our study of this twofold event by asking about its possibility and its probability.

Jesus Christ had a human body like our own. Is there in the structure and the uses of the human body itself—and so in the body Christ shared with us—both capacity and demand for resurrection? Are there in the material body existing in a material world, partaking of its peculiar elements and surroundings, in this intense life which pervades the physical world in its vegetable and animal forms, any premonitions, anticipations, suggestions, and adaptations which

show not only the possibility but the probability in this direction?

We do not, indeed, know what is the real essence of either mind or body. We know only certain phenomena. But the inference that each exists is warranted. To the mind belong thought and feeling, conscience and will. To the body belong such unlike things as hardness and softness, color and weight, form and measure. Mind has not one attribute of body. Body has not one attribute of mind. It is, then, reasonable to believe that the two essences, that of mind and that of body, are entirely dissimilar. United in some strange way, they have mutual relations. Mental and moral exercises are parallel with movements of the brain substance; but because parallel they are not identical; because acting together they are not convertible, but only reciprocal. Because correlated they are shown to be separated in substance.

And the mind of a man is one mind as the body is one body. It ought not to be necessary to say that during all existence, so far as we know it, the mind is one mind; and yet the recent efforts in the line of doubt and even of denial as to the reality of the mind, and the proposition to substitute therefor "mere states of mentality," make it necessary to go over the proofs of the fact that the mind is one mind exactly as the body is one body. The one fact of the phenomena of sleep, which would break the chain were we "mindless, and only susceptible of states of mentality"—sleep, out of which we wake and resume the old train of think-

ing and know that we ourselves are the same persons in mind and in body as before we slept—that one fact would seem to settle the whole question. Any attempt to show that we have not a real body because of the "continuous exercises" of the beating heart and the coursing blood and the seeing eye and the hearing ear, would be as unreasonable as to urge that "mental exercises," because continuous, do not prove the reality and separateness of a single mind. The body is not a mere "complex of impressions." No more is the mind. Each is related to the other, and that each is related shows that each is real in itself. Relations are possible only in things actually separated. Because each moves the other through these relations we hold that each is more certainly real. The continuity of both of them, until each has done all it can do, is to be expected. The soul may be, must be, of higher grade, but they belong together; and if by any intervention they are separated for a time they still have their immortal affinities and there is in them the mutual demand, not to say prophecy, for their future immortal union.

Nor does the fact that one of these two existences is usually visible and tangible, while the other is not, affect the question of the reality of either. For, even of matter, it is certain that many forms of it are susceptible of vast changes; their properties for years lying unseen, and even unknown, waiting for human discovery. So that the unseen is by no means in all cases to be relegated to the spiritual. The invisible portions of the material universe are just now objects

of the most careful study by the world's scholars. The air with its gases, the earth with its strange electrical forces, are instances of realities in nature which are unseen. Facts and forces thrust themselves on us; and the correlation of these energies and the changes they present while still remaining a part of the same physical system of the world are most astonishing. It looks as if the metaphysician who wrote over his door, "There is nothing great but mind," had made a mistake. Had he written, "There is nothing greater than mind," he might have been nearer the truth. The most perfect form of matter we know is the human body as it is joined with the human soul. Endowed with the principle of life, it would seem capable of exhibiting a vastly greater range of changes than any form of inanimate nature. There may be in it a constitutional basis for changing manifestations. Now we see it only under one form. It would be strange if, while all things having lower kinds of life have capacity for wonderful changes, this more wonderful human body of ours was confined to the single form of manifestation now commonly seen. The possibility of a new form of resurrection-life for it may not be safely denied. With our eye on the varying forms of animate and inanimate nature about us, resurrection for the body is even more than possible. Does it not even reach the degree of probability? The abundant life of each returning year is singularly suggestive of resurrection for the body. Botanists, surveying life broadly, are now claiming that each particular stage

of vegetable life indicates something beyond itself. In the original order of creation vegetable life looked forward to the time when, by one of those "creative eras" which foremost geologists are now claiming, animal life was to be thrust in upon a prepared planet. Each kind of life forges a link as a loop through which runs the next link of the continuous chain. All life is unto life in some higher form.

> "Spring's real glory lies not in the meaning,
> Gracious though it be of her blue hours;
> But it is hidden in her tender leaning
> To Summer's richer wealth of flowers."

In its season of growth the world is full of these suggestions, these premonitions of a better, even a resurrection, state for man; and if so, then peculiarly so in the case of Him who was to be "the first fruits of them that slept."

There is among these premonitions in nature a singular law by which decay and death, though from a narrower point of view antagonistic to life, become an actual arrangement, on the very broadest scale, for the perpetuity of life.[1] The decay of numerous parts of any organized structure does not necessarily destroy vitality. The decay of autumn enriches life in the long run. In many cases autumnal decay insures the continuous existence of tree and shrub and flower. Often something invisible seems to remain out of which a future life is to come, and next year's spring will see

[1] Dr. Bailey, in *The Joys and Sorrows of an Atom*, says, "Anything that looks like death is but a token and certificate that life is about to start anew on another plane."

millions of these preparations taking on the forms of an actual resurrection. No leaf on any tree but, if left to itself to do its work, will prepare to die by preparing for another life. In the little formation just where the leaf joins the twig is the preparation for the future. There will be no leaf next year where that little rolled-up bract is not found. The symbol of resurrection is left on the twig by every dying leaf in autumn.

Is it urged that "in case of the death of all parts of the plant there is no resurrection"? Then the question at once rises whether all parts of a plant are ever visible; whether in what we may call death there is not something invisible still surviving. That which in some plants certainly does survive after all signs are gone is an invisible thing. No research can find it. It is a life deeper than all the visible death of all the visible parts. So that there is a point where both life and death pass into invisibility. One might argue that it is the same with the human body. All you see dies; but do you ever see all? All you can measure with any one of the senses dies. Is that all that belongs to the mysterious life of the body? What if there is material in every human body belonging to that large class of invisible substance which it is reasonable to believe forms a part of the physical universe? What if there is a surviving germ about which at some time the corporeal nature may gather all that is needful for some higher state of bodily development needed in some more perfect condition?

We know that life is, though it is unseen. One thing unseen, others may exist unseen. Our senses always are just on the edge of an extension for which they seem partially prepared. There are eyes in beast and bird far sharper than those in any man during his present development. We seem always on the verge of developing additional senses to grasp additional realities. Germs of man's ideal state, as it would have been had God not taken into account our coming sin as a race, may exist altogether beyond anything conceivable to us, but always visible to the divine eye. The coarser stuff of the material body and its cruder sense by no means disprove the existence of a finer material and both a sharper and a better range of senses, to suit a higher condition of life further on.[1] The present body may be likened to the seed sown in the furrow. All that is visible molders away into absolute rottenness. But this death of all that is visible only gives an invisible something its opportunity for which it had long waited. Premonition, anticipation, and preparation get opportunity to become actuality. Out of this death comes a peculiar life, each "seed its own body;" that is, its own form is figured. But the germ in the seed demands new conditions. It wants to get out of its dark and noisome grave. It seeks resurrection into air and light that it may take on forms entirely unlike the planted seed. Root,

[1] "The visible system is only a small part of the universe; and there must be an invisible order of things which will remain and possess energy when the energy of the present system has passed away."—*The Unseen Universe.*

stalk, flower, fruit—how completely they differ from the hard dry seed! And yet they are simply the old life in its newer forms. Indeed, in some respects the resurrection of the seed is more wonderful than that claimed for the body of Christ; than that claimed by those who hold to the literal bodily resurrection of all believers in him.

> "For each one body that in earth is sown
> There's an uprising of but one for one;
> But for each grain that in the ground is thrown
> Threescore and fourscore spring up thence for one:
> So that the wonder is not half so great
> Of ours as is the uprising of the wheat."

In nature one form of life sometimes very nearly approaches another form of the same life. It is the same life that we see in the disgusting caterpillar and the gay butterfly. The transition at last is so sudden that both forms seem alive at nearly or quite the same moment. Something which nearly approximates to a twofold form of life is always going on about us. Shrubs are bursting into blossom, the dull plant becomes scarlet and white. The flower is but the changed leaf. Macmillan tells us that "in the plant the bracts are the recoil or retrogression from fullest development, enabling the plant—in the same way that an athlete takes a step back in order to leap over an obstacle—to produce the higher formation of the flower and fruit; and death itself may be regarded as a bract of that continuous existence whose roots and foliage are here and whose blossoms and fruit are in

eternity." Thus these indications and premonitions are of value as showing that the human body of the Lord was capable of resurrection. They make us familiar with the idea and prepare us the better to consider the proof as the Scriptures offer it. They even warrant an expectation that death may have no lasting dominion over the "Lord of life;" that it is only a step toward another stage of development, and that there may be, in his case, so swift a transition that the two-fold form of that bodily life may be a necessary exhibition in the interval alleged to have occurred between his resurrection and his ascension.[1]

To all this argument concerning the body of our Lord as susceptible of resurrection the reply may be made that any such resurrection is miraculous and is therefore to be rejected. But on what ground rejected? There can be but two grounds: either because the miraculous is impossible or because it is impossible of proof. If there is an Almighty God, a miracle is possible. If one should allege that there can be no evidence sufficient to prove a miracle, then we might ask whether the God able to do the miracle is not also able to give the proof of it. We might ask whether any different kind of proof is needed here than elsewhere. That a thing is miraculous is simply an in-

[1] The question of Christ's alleged resurrection body as corporeal or as spiritual has been often discussed. If we are permitted to think of him as able to manifest himself at will in either way during those memorable days between the resurrection and the ascension the question is less perplexing.

ference of ours about it. It can be substantiated, exactly as can any other fact, apart from the subsequent inference about it as a natural or as a miraculous event. It is not always easy to define the limits of the natural. It is not easy to say just where the supernatural comes in. Nature and the supernatural may not be antagonistic, and may not, on the other hand, be identical. But the supernatural may be sometimes, at least, the extension and overworking, the intense energizing, of that which has susceptibility for being so used. The miraculous—a form of the supernatural—may be conceived of as having always a basis in the natural, when wrought on any such material as a human body. The physical is made to do what otherwise it would not do. The body of the Lord will not naturally revive itself, but, as a body, there is a basis on which the supernatural may do its work. Nor must we omit the fact of high moral purpose in the New Testament miracles—a purpose that would culminate in the alleged resurrection of Jesus. This resurrection would be no freak of mere power; no mere characterless deed; no mere buttress of unconnected events. It would be, if he really rose from the dead, an actual part, and no inconsiderable part, of the very substance of Christianity; the bursting through of the partition, and the incarnation of moral fact in physical form. In such a case possibility rises to the height of probability, indication becomes premonition, warranted anticipation stirs us to expectation, and hope is ready to listen to proof that all these prophecies

have culminated in an actual resurrection of the body of Christ.

And what has been urged in the above paragraph in answer to the objection that such a resurrection of the Lord's body would be miraculous is equally an answer to the same objection when urged against his alleged ascension. We are always on the edge of the marvelous. In nature the unseen world is always indicated, and thus that which one age calls impossible is held by the next age to be highly probable. The levitation of the human body would not be considered as among the most startling of miracles. Surely all the possibilities of the human body are not yet ascertained. Physiology is not an exhausted science, and its close neighbor, psychology is advancing, through new methods of study, to new knowledge of the mind that so much uses the body. It is the thoughtful declaration of the authors of *The Unseen Universe* that "it has dawned upon the minds of scientific men that there is something besides matter or stuff in the physical universe which has an objective reality. The visible system is only a small part of the universe." These glimpses of the new capacities in matter, of the new forces inherent in it and of the new forms it may assume, are very significant. The coarser physical material may not be the whole that belongs rightfully to the human body. This physical substance, to the partial exclusion of the finer stuff that would have given larger scope to the bodily organization, may have been selected in anticipation of the primal sin,

and as suited to the present imperfect state of man in an imperfect world. It is certain that our physical body as now we possess it, if in some respects a fair instrument for the expression of our mental and moral powers, is in other respects a hindrance. It hampers rather than helps. It restricts. The soul beats itself often against the barriers that confine it. The ideal form of the body is not yet ours. There are possibilities of wonderful development through finer material and sharper senses; possibilities of a "spiritual body" —a body completely suited to the perfect expression of a perfect spirit. And that some of these more delicate properties of matter should be manifested in the case of our Lord, in the alleged event of resurrection, and its completion in his ascent into his own native heaven, is not only possible but probable.

And by these preliminary thoughts about the possibility and probability of some such way of our Lord's departure from us we are better prepared for a more critical study of the testimony of the witnesses to the event.

CHAPTER V.

The Witnesses to His Resurrection and Ascension.

We come next to ask about the character and credibility of those who claim to be witnesses to the fact of a risen and an ascended Christ.

The earliest New Testament writer to name on his pages Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead is the apostle Paul. His first Epistles, as all admit, antedate our written Gospels, and give a remarkable prominence to this twofold event. Alike in his preaching and in his writing he looks back through that resurrection and ascension upon the whole career of his Lord.

It is indeed true that no one was present at the moment of the resurrection save the Lord himself, so he is never, in any testimony, "the rising Lord." He is the "risen Lord" in all the evidence submitted to the world. Paul wrote long enough after the events of the life, death, and resurrection to know of the accredited "oral gospel" on so many lips. He had seen those who had seen Christ before and after the resurrection. He knew, therefore, the full content of the earliest preaching by men who had been eyewitnesses of the main Christian facts. He had examined with his own careful, logical, and practical mind, the

evidence on which Christian belief rested in that age. He was the most able of any of the early believers to weigh the whole evidence as to a fact which he, even more than any one of them, saw to involve so much. He saw with his great grasp of mind that, the resurrection true, all was true; false, all was false. Any mistake as to that fact, the "faith was in vain" and Christians the "most miserably mistaken" men on earth. He saw, through that miracle, the credibility of all the previous miracles of the Lord; and he proposed to risk the whole argument of Christianity on that one fact. Writing when he did, a few years after the first preachers had gone out—when he must have met them and known accurately what they said about the birth, life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus—he gives us, on this matter of the resurrection, the sum of the oral gospels. We get from him the gospel as popularly held and recited by early believers before the story of it had been committed to writing by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He has taken his facts not from their Gospels but from themselves and their fellow-disciples. We are thus able not only to know the facts as told, but to compare the oral with the written Gospels.

Paul is thus our earliest gospel writer when he discourses of the resurrection of the Lord. In his Epistle to the Galatians he insists that his conversion was not due to the other apostles. They had not, he declares, called and commissioned him. The first proof of the resurrection, he claims, came to him when on the "way

to Damascus" he saw the risen Lord. His authority as a religious teacher—that was the point questioned—was directly from the Lord Jesus himself. But think of those subsequent fifteen days when he went up to Jerusalem and abode with Peter.[1] Mark's Gospel, which is really Peter's, was not yet written out, but Peter had it all in mind. These two men, Peter and Paul, must have gone over all the facts starting with the resurrection, about which they had this in common—that they too had seen Jesus after he had died. They go over together that marvelous life, less in its beginning and more in its culmination. Is the stamp of Paul's interview on Peter's way of looking on the events to be seen in the fact that Mark's Gospel has so little to say about the first part and so much to say about the last part of Christ's career? For vividness of narration Mark, with Peter behind him, is conspicuous in his Gospel. His Gospel is most like what the oral gospels must have been. Then, too, Paul must have heard the men who vended the gospel, as a divine commodity, in all the world, and he has no rebuke of any mistake; no words of reproof for these hundreds of itinerants. Their gospel was his gospel. And when he sums up the evidences for the resurrection in the Epistle to the Corinthians he depends on these traditional testimonies for his facts. His inspiration recognizes the accuracy of the oral gospels among believers on this matter. So that by Paul we get back further than the time when the evangelists wrote out

[1] Gal. i, 18.

their Gospels. We have the original of the originals—the gospel at the outset of Christianity. And we get also the immensely important fact that the new religion was held by all believers as true because of the one stupendous fact authenticating all the others—the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave and his ascension to heaven.

So, too, Paul's peculiar grasp of Christianity as a whole was gained through his settled faith in the resurrection. His gospel is that of the death and the resurrection as the basal facts. All doctrine starts there with him. "I delivered unto you that which I received, first of all, how that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and that he rose again the third day." There is no evidence that the revelation on the way to Damascus taught him that Christ "had died" or had been "buried" or was in the grave "three days." All these circumstances he had learned elsewhere, and he uses them in his inspired reasoning, which is based on facts known to him by competent testimony. But he seizes on the two things, the "death" and the "resurrection," as primal events—not in order of time but in order of importance. The mathematics of the new religion—the due order, in months, days, and years, of the birth and of each miracle and teaching of Jesus—was all incidental to him. What Jesus was as Lord and Christ, what he did in redeeming us from sin, in restoring us to God, the meaning, the object of it as a whole—that was of far more importance than anything or all things his Lord had said. This infinite

and loving purpose was worth more than any detail which Matthew and Mark and Luke and John would give to men by and by.

This, too, was Christ's way of preaching his own gospel. He did not require from Nicodemus the committing to memory of any facts about the birth in the manger or the baptism in the Jordan. He condensed the whole fact and the whole doctrine of his religion into one sentence: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Detail might come after the man should be "born again" through receiving this truth.

With both Jesus and Paul the need, purpose, occasion, and results of the gospel are the main things. The presentation is not, as we might at first expect, this: that such a death and resurrection emphasize the previous life and commend it as our example. The idea of Paul is the rather that the believer, in God's view, died in Christ's dying and rose in Christ's rising, and that this is to be realized in our experience of these facts. The facts are to be held less with the factual and more with the experiential grasp. The believer, in Paul's idea, is "risen with Christ" as he was "crucified with Christ." The ideal in God's mind is to be the practical in ours. The historical death of the Lord is to be the experiential death of his disciple. The historical resurrection is to become the moral resurrection in us. He sees the whole Christian life through the twofold lens of these events in Christ's career. He

is so firm a believer in the proven fact that Christ rose, that this truth is the sunlight flooding all Christian outlook. John may see more into the personal consciousness of Jesus, and in that sense he "knew him." But it is Paul who speaks of knowing "the mind of Christ." He sees most into the meaning and purpose of Christ's coming, the worth of his death and resurrection in behalf of the race. Paul is incomparably the wider believer. He has larger horizons. He sees the scope of God's plan to an extent unknown to any other biblical writer. The two great objective facts to him are the death and the resurrection of the Lord, and he works them out in their relation alike to God and to man. To him their bearing is direct on human character and human conduct. The dying of the Lord is ever our "dying to sin;" his resurrection life is ever to be repeated in our "newness of life." A hundred changes are rung on these facts, and this way of spiritually apprehending them becomes convincing as to the reality of the facts themselves. For these are not merely stated but used. The resurrection is more than asserted. There could be nothing to assert about other things if this were not true. It is used as we use the first axiomatic truths in geometry. They must be true or there would be no geometry. There is a resurrection or there would be no religion, in Paul's idea of it. In the midst of a profound argument founded on principles rather than on facts he bursts out with, "Now is Christ risen from the dead"—as if it must be so. It is all practical. These facts convince.

"If then ye be risen with Christ, seek those things above, where Christ sitteth."

And yet this Paul, to whom in stronger moods facts are principles among which he treads with firm foot, can stop to recite, for his own and for others' good, the plain granitic verities. He enumerates six appearances.[1] They are gained, not from our four Gospels, which have not yet been written, but he finds them in the steady testimony of the eyewitnesses who give the uniform belief of the inspired tradition, the common creed of the Christian Church. He names the six that suit his special purpose, thus giving hints to the coming Gospel writers, each one of whom cites only those appearances of the Lord that suit his special purpose in writing.

He cites, first of all, "Cephas;" that is, Peter. But Peter has not only his own evidence, as an eyewitness of the Lord's presence after the resurrection, but Peter is one of the great number of personal witnesses on whose testimony the early Church held their one great uniform tradition. Some have wondered that we do not have here Paul's quotation of the very words in which Peter gave him the story of the resurrection life during those wonderful "fifteen days" in which the two men were together at Jerusalem. But had Paul preserved Peter's words the testimony would have been only that of the one man, Peter; while by citing him in the way he does, we get three things: (1) The traditional and accepted belief, any departure from which

[1] 1 Cor. xv, 5-8.

in Paul's case would have been detected and exposed by readers of the Epistle; (2) Peter's testimony, by the consent he gives, in which Paul, so ready elsewhere to reprove him, takes his word without demur and cites him as witness; (3) Paul's comparison, in his own mind, of what he had seen with what Peter had seen. So that this way of quoting is, under the circumstances, of threefold strength. For each of the two men had seen the Risen One, and their testimony is so accordant that the one man cites the other after due conference and comparison.

Paul's second item of evidence is Christ's appearance to "the twelve," as recorded by Luke.[1] They were credible witnesses and are spoken of by him as those whose evidence was too well known to need citation in direct words.

His third evidence is the appeal to the testimony of the "five hundred." They saw him in Galilee, where he was best known, and they saw him "at once." Luke does not mention the "five hundred," yet he must have known that Paul had cited this fact and had cited it as the common belief, a part of the "oral gospel." But the obvious reason for the omission alike of giving the common belief and of inserting any quotation from Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians about the "five hundred" will be considered further on.

The fourth witness is "James." If this is the James who was with Peter, all that we have said about the interview with the latter disciple has new force; for

[1] Comp. 1 Cor. xv, 5, with Luke xxiv, 36, *et seq.*

the two men, James and John, were of singularly unlike temperament, and they would well supplement each other as witnesses of the facts, and in their testimony as to the formation of the popular belief among the disciples.

The fifth witness whom Paul calls is "the twelve" in another interview with the Lord, also recorded by Luke.

The sixth item of the evidence is that given to Paul himself as occurring on his way to Damascus. As so much depends upon this manifestation to Paul, this evidence must have careful study.

Some things are obvious on the face of the narration. One is that Paul at the time and ever afterward believed that he saw the literal body of Jesus Christ after the Lord had died. The words in which he gives the detail are very distinct, and the profound influence of the interview on his whole character and career was such that, if ever there was a thoroughly changed man, Paul was that man. True, he uses that word of double meaning, "vision," in one of his descriptions of what occurred. Our use, to-day, of the word in its adjective form is a derogative use. The "visionary" is with us the fantastic, the imaginative, the deceptive, the unreal. But the other, the large and noble use of the word, is almost exactly the opposite. The word describes, when used naturally and in strictly philological exactness, "what is seen," that which appears at the moment when the eye rests upon it. In any particular case the whole mass of circumstances decides whether the "vision" is

that of the imagination or of the senses. In this case the "vision" is that appearance of Christ to the apostle the reality of which he so reiterates that his holy indignation would have been stirred to the utmost had anyone hinted at a mental illusion. He says he saw a light,[1] describes it as exceeding "the splendor of the noonday sun;" that he heard audible words, and tells what they were—others seeing the light and hearing the voice but failing to distinguish the exact sentences uttered.[2] From the intimation in Acts xxvi, 16-18, it would appear that the communication was much beyond what is recorded. Paul's attitudes of body are given. He "stood," that is, stopped, speechless. Subsequently both he and his companions "fell to the ground," they all hearing an indistinct voice, but "seeing no man" who could have spoken. He only of the company sees "the Lord" and recognizes definite words addressed to himself. He says, speaking of the moment before he was blinded, that he had then seen the risen Christ;[3] so that as an actual eyewitness of the reality of Christ's resurrection life he afterward claims that he is at least on an equality with the other disciples. Presently his eyes—eyelids—were opened, but he saw none of his companions. He then knew that he was blind.[4] Ananias is sent to him and the sight of his eyes is restored. All this is of the most realistic character. Other persons are connected with it. Time, place, details, persons who are opponents and who are friends, are given. Hallucination is out of the ques-

[1] Acts ix, 3. [2] Acts xxii, 9. [3] 1 Cor. ix, 1. [4] Acts ix, 8.

tion. He knew fully, others knew partially, just what had occurred. Then, too, as if to banish all idea of mental illusion there is a moral side to the whole series of events. Telling his experience to objectors, he presents the phenomenon in its external literalness; telling it among believers, he gives the corresponding spiritual phenomena—the latter impossible had the light and voice and servants and the Lord, and, finally, Ananias, been seen only in a dream or in a moment of epileptic excitement. The external calls for an internal manifestation; as does the internal for the external phenomena. The two exactly coincide, and so exclude all idea of merely mental vision. Paul sees the light; sees at the same moment the proof of the Christ. He falls to the earth; and he falls prostrate in spirit. He recognizes, in some way which we may not understand, who speaks to him. His Hebrew training would have suggested that God spoke, but he knows that the speaker is the Christ he is persecuting. Over against the words of the speaker are the words of the prostrate man. In place of the "threatenings and slaughter" which he had "breathed out" at the beginning of his journey are words, now that he has recovered from his first speechless amazement, which combine all penitence, all faith, all submission, all consecration. His words, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" are in exact character. The persecutor becomes a friend of the persecuted; the energetic opponent will be as energetic a disciple. Describing the scene as it appeared on its external side,

he uses the words "to me he appeared"—*κἀμοὶ ὤφθη.*[1] Describing the same scene from the spiritual side, he says, "in me God revealed his Son"—*ἐν ἐμοί.*[2] It is in this exact harmony between the external and the spiritual that we find the absolute banishment of any trace of mental hallucination. The bodily Christ was revealed to his bodily eye, the spiritual Christ to his soul. All else is excluded. The message to Ananias and his interview with Paul, whose bodily blindness—as real as all the other realities in the story—was cured by the word of the Lord Jesus, through this disciple, are all in keeping. The immediate labor of the converted man at Damascus is exactly of a piece with that which historically preceded and historically follows.

Paul's testimony to the resurrection, as one who had seen the Lord after that event, is to be added to the common faith of the earlier Christians founded on other testimony. He names the preexisting proof, as Peter, James, John, and the others accepted it, before he mentions his own most important contribution to the evidences of it. So that we have his indorsement of their witness as well as his own direct and personal testimony.

And the reason for Paul's citation of these proofs of the common belief of the Christian communities in the resurrection of Jesus may be considered as the clinching of the argument; for his object is to prove the resurrection of believers because of the *corporeity of*

[1] 1 Cor. xv, 8. [2] Cor. i, 16.

the Lord's resurrection. He rests his entire argument for the resurrection of the believing dead not at all on any word of Christ, but upon the fact of Christ's bodily resurrection. He must have known of Christ's promises. He passes them all. He uses just this one thing: "Now is Christ risen from the dead." He does, indeed, employ the analogy of the germ in the seed, in that wonderful fifteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Corinthians, but he has not used it as an argument, as he might have done; only as an illustration drawn from the manner of nature's resurrection. He answers by this figure an objector who asks, "How are the dead raised up?" The whole proof rests on the indubitable fact that there has been a specimen of resurrection in the case of Jesus.

It is obvious that the mere resurrection is but a partial restoration of our Lord to his original state. It leaves him on earth. The completed idea is that of an ascension to where he was before he came to us. His ascension is his perfect glorification. The two events are considered by the apostles as one completed event; so that one of the gospel writers puts the two together, and omits all reference to the intervening "forty days" which he and all the others knew so well. The ascension is constantly implied in the resurrection. "It is the root and beginning of the ascension" in the conception of the New Testament. It is assumed by the two evangelists who do not give us the details.[1] It is presupposed as a fact believed by those in the churches

[1] Matt. xxvi, 64; John xvi, 22.

addressed by the writers of the Epistles.[1] Jesus is ever the Lord who has ascended into his glory. There is a continuous sense of the omnipresence of the Lord as one seated at the right hand of all power, and therefore we are not to regard the ascension of the Lord so much as a bodily transformation—that took place at his resurrection—but the rather as his entrance again into the heavenly state; as an exaltation from the conditions he had imposed upon himself in his earthly career. He rises physically and visibly. The act leaves its own impression on the world's thought. Chosen witnesses see him in the very act of resuming the infinite glory he had with his Father before the world was.[2] As the details of the infancy are so fittingly given by Luke in his Gospel, so the details of the ascension are given by him both in his Gospel and in his Acts.

In the book of the Revelation John does not see his Lord in the act of rising from the grave, nor in the completed act of rising from the earth into the heavens. All that is past, in John's conception. Christ is now, for John in the Revelation, already ascended. He has resumed all his original glory. He is now the undisguised Son of God. He sits on the throne. He rules the world, in all its changes, in the interests of his kingdom. He dieth no more. Resurrection and ascension are long gone by. Glorification is begun, is continuing, and continues for evermore. Gospel story and the assumptions, so well warranted, of the former facts

[1] Acts ii, 31-33; also vii, 55; Eph. i, 20, 21; ii, 6; iv, 8; Phil. ii, 6, 10; 1 Tim. iii, 16; 1 Pet. iii, 22; Rev. i, 13-19. [2] John xvii, 5.

have given place to testimony as to the glorious future of Christ's Church. The Apocalypse sees the risen Lord. Thus witnesses whose literary methods take various forms agree in furnishing us, in our New Testament, an indisputable testimony to the resurrection and the ascension of the Lord.

The credibility of the witnesses to the twofold event is a matter that need not long detain us. Matthew and John, themselves original apostles, were credible men; the one, as his Gospel shows him to be, a man of large brain, and the other, peculiarly near to Jesus, a man of large heart. Each of these men selects his facts, out of the vast material before him, according to his distinct purpose in writing. Their variations are just those which a good lawyer would like to have in his witnesses, showing no collusion. Their agreement in the main facts is obvious. They are both describing the same life and death and resurrection. Mark, for some reason not now clearly understood, but in no way prejudicial to his veracity, is writing for Peter; for he always sees things as through Peter's eyes. His turns of thought and ways of speech, his rapid and incisive narrative, are so like Peter as to have suggested direct dictation, at least in parts of the Gospel, and authority in all. Luke, in his opening chapter, confesses that he is simply "setting in order the things commonly believed"[1] among the band of apostles and disciples at large. So that we have a painstaking man, educated, careful, and accurate, with peculiar means, through

[1] Luke i, 1, 2.

intimacy with the "holy family" for knowing, not only the hidden secret of the birth, but the open proof of the resurrection. His attestation, therefore, is that of the whole circle of those nearest the facts. For years he kept close company with Paul, who was also a careful investigator among the original sources of information. So that Luke has not only his own most important researches, and those of Paul, but he gives us professedly the contents of that "oral gospel" which was preached at the outset. Had he changed a single statement of the "oral gospel," especially about the resurrection, the change would have been instantly detected and exposed. For these things were not done in a corner, and the statement of them was world-wide before he wrote. He opens with a challenge which no opponent ventured to meet. Better the word of such a man, so situated and so representative of the thousands who knew the facts, than if we had half a dozen Gospels by as many apostles.

It may be that Divine Wisdom, foreseeing how certainly the Christian religion as a series of facts must rest ultimately on careful documentary evidence, ordained this singularly complete arrangement of the evidences; which, so far as we can see, is the best possible testimony for all ages until time shall end.

CHAPTER VI.

The Testimony of the Witnesses to the Resurrection and Ascension.

The witnesses, as we have seen in the previous section, are credible men. They had the best possible means of knowing the truth in this matter. Some of them saw Christ after his resurrection, and that, too, under circumstances where mistake was impossible. Two of them in the first five or seven years, while all was yet fresh and freshly known, set themselves to examine the evidences. These two men were by nature and training the men best able to do this work. They had access to original sources of information. At length, before their death, these two men, Luke and Paul, who for years were in closest relations, wrote out what they had so carefully ascertained.

Let us now turn to the testimony of our four evangelists.

Keep in mind the purpose of Matthew, as gathered from the whole tone of his writings. Let us keep the idea before us that he is writing to exhibit the royalty of Christ and his final dominion over all the world. He shows the Lord's descent from David as a king, and he has always in mind the setting forth of kingly function as Christ's great and distinctive character-

istic. And so out of the ten appearances which were before him as material he cites but two, and they are exactly in keeping with his obvious purpose. We should expect him to give us the story in narrative form. That is exactly what he does, and he is the only one who so gives it.[1] His narrative bears the marks of a tradition coming from the Roman soldier then on guard, and who might have been afterward converted. Matthew gives the Jewish story about the Roman watch "asleep" as it would be given in scorn by one there, and who knew better. Writing from the standpoint he did, Matthew must record the royal air of the resurrection, the kingly victory of the Risen One. So, too, Matthew selects the appearance to the women.[2] Mark and Luke give only their return, but omit the story of the appearance to them. The incident of their worshiping the Risen One is, as we should expect, cited by Matthew, and by him alone. That which honors Jesus, or shows others as honoring him, Matthew will select and insert in his Gospel.

The other manifestation is that given to "the eleven." But this exactly accords with the appearance to the "five hundred" named by Paul.[3] Matthew alone tells us where this occurred. That the call to a rendezvous was specially addressed to the eleven by no means excludes the wider invitation. The eleven only are named by Matthew because to him they are the immediate bodyguard of the royal personage. They are

[1] Matt. xxviii, 2–4. [2] Matt. xxviii, 1.
[3] Comp. Matt. xxviii, 16, with 1 Cor. xv, 7.

the King's friends. They are the especial and authorized and official witnesses to the ages that "He is risen." Matthew, ever true to his purpose, sets forth the climax of the Lord's history. This is the evangelist who makes the King, in the glory of his new resurrection life, to stand on his spiritual throne and send forth heralds to summon the world's allegiance: "Go ye, therefore"—the tone is regal in this world-wide proclamation—"teach all nations. I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Matthew saw Jesus come as a King and go as a King. Resurrection was crowning, to Matthew.

Turning now to Mark's Gospel we find first of all the story, as in all the other evangelists, of "the empty tomb."[1] In common with Matthew he gives the return of "the women," but omits this appearance of the Lord. Writing under the inspiration of Peter, he gives the appearance to Mary Magdalene as "the first;" for it was the first to Peter. Renan, with his usual disregard of exact facts, says, "The enthusiasm of an hysterical woman has given a new God to the world." But that she was an hysterical woman remains to be proved; that she was the only, or even the chief, witness is simply Renan's assumption; that the disciples at first discredited her testimony[2] until confirmed by others is not noticed by him in the French novel to which he has given the title of *The Life of Jesus.* Mark, in his own brief way, condenses into a single sentence the story of the walk to Emmaus—the story so fully given

[1] Mark xvi, 1–4. [2] Mark xvi, 11.

by Luke. The last verses in the sixteenth of Mark have been questioned, but strong evidence of their genuineness is found in their literary style. They are exactly in Mark's mood. Their crisp and rapid narration is precisely like that shown everywhere else in his Gospel. That he is not copying Luke, and yet that he had the same source of information as that evangelist, is clear from his altered word when describing the interview. Luke says their "eyes were holden"—literally, "were mastered." Mark, pictorial always, says that "he appeared in another form." And Mark has also the story of the evening meal when the disciples from Emmaus burst in upon them with the news of the risen Christ. The third of the appearances which Mark mentions—third in order as Peter saw them, but fifth in chronological order—is that vouchsafed to the eleven in Thomas's absence. Characteristically, this is omitted by Matthew but given by Mark. It was too dramatic to escape his notice. The upbraiding of the disciples for their unbelief, would not suit the purpose of the one, but it is fit material for the design of the other evangelist. Peter's hand is seen in naming the order of the events as Mark gives them; seen, too, in the selection of the material, and also in the rapidity and *verve* of the story. For the divine inspiration of the writer would no more change his mental peculiarities than the peculiar features of his face. With the idea of the Roman power ever in mind, Mark sees how the Roman would doubt. And he is careful to name the fact that Mary's story and the story of the Emmaus

disciples awakened doubt at first. He would show that they were not credulous men. And there is the understood inference that, if these men were incredulous at first, they must have been careful about the proofs that afterward compelled them to believe in the resurrection of their Lord. Mark ends his Roman Gospel in character; for his last words about his Lord and Master are these: "So then, after he had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God"!

To Luke we turn—Luke who sets forth Christ as the Saviour for the whole world. He was in closest touch, after the resurrection, with the little inner circle of the first disciples. He knew the traditional belief of the first few years on all questions of the birth and death and resurrection. Scraps of the history had been jotted down by various disciples. These he knew. These, if needed, he would be likely to use. His intimate relation to all the parties made him our best annalist of events on their inner side, and his education gave his narratives a certain orderliness as well as proportion. This evangelist, as do all the others, starts in his story by giving us "the empty tomb"—a fact which shows what importance they all attached to that circumstance; a fact which shows also the state of mind of the disciples themselves at the outset and goes far to account for their early incredulity, which the events subsequently known completely overcame. The evening walk to Emmaus is given in detail by Luke with tender grace; and its ending, as they

return to Jerusalem to find the assembled disciples, is recorded. Then the Lord's sudden manifestation and his exposition of the Scriptures about himself, ending in a world-wide commission to be afterward repeated —all this is material for a gospel so broad in its scope as this of Luke. But, while Luke dwells on the details of this interview with a fullness not found in Mark, the incident is so managed, in its relation to other incidents, that we get through it an indorsement of the facts known to Mary, to Peter and John, also to the women and to "the eleven." The Emmaus disciples saw the Lord twice during that memorable "first day of the week." If the hints given are followed out, and if we accept the belief of many that Luke rather than John was the anonymous traveler to Emmaus, we shall have an additional reason for Luke's selection of an incident which connects itself with all the other appearances on that memorable day. The interweaving of personal narrative with the testimony of others makes the strongest presentation possible of the fact of the Lord's resurrection. Just here a difficulty has been named. Luke's story taken alone would leave the impression that on that very evening the Lord ascended after giving the "great commission." But that Luke himself did not consider that he had given such an impression is manifest from the fact that in the Acts he inserts the statement of the "forty days" between the rising from the grave and the rising into the sky. But the point of view from which Luke would present the Saviour of the world to his readers accounts for

the haste in which, omitting intervening events until his second book (the Acts) should be written, he hurries on to the conclusion of his Gospel. He will recount, in his second book, certain closing facts in the resurrection life of the Lord and make them the starting point for his new story of "the Acts of the Lord, the Spirit."

To John's Gospel we now turn, with its sweetness and tenderness. It has been happily called "the heart of Jesus." Written last, some have intimated that its object was to supply deficiencies in the other Gospels. But so far is it from this that it might be held, in not a few respects, to increase the difficulties of constructing a continuous story. John's aim is as individual as is that of either of the other evangelists. It is the story of the divine Lord becoming man for the redemption and salvation of all who shall believe on him. The story of the last days of the Lord is given with great fullness, and if some additional details concerning the resurrection are found on his pages, it is only because they best illustrate his own mood or best serve his definite purpose. He, too, starts with the empty sepulcher; but his description alone has the air of an eyewitness. He sees the events rather than records the testimony of others. He is a part of his own history. He tells of the ardent affection that led the loving disciple to go first to the tomb, and that the zeal of his companion, Peter, carried him into the place of burial, where he was speedily followed by the evangelist himself. He had "looked in" at first, and saw that all was

in order there save that the body was gone. He went in to satisfy himself further. He saw, from the linen clothes left as they were in due order, and from the napkin that had been on the face, now folded carefully and laid apart, that there had been no violent snatching of the body, no hasty work of enemies, and that any removal of the body by friends without the clothing was impossible, even could they have gained access to the sepulcher. He himself says that at this sight "he believed." Believed what? Clearly, that somehow the Lord had risen. The disciples as a body did not yet do it. He, over the empty grave, believes that his Lord lives somewhere a bodily life. Love draws quick as well as sure conclusions from evidence which as yet was negative. "The disciples knew not"—it had not occurred to them as it now flashed on him—that "the Scriptures" of the Old Testament had foretold the resurrection which would leave an empty tomb.[1] Then comes the second in the order of the appearances of the Lord, the first in John's record—that to Mary Magdalene at the sepulcher. The scene introducing the dialogue, with its reference to his ascension to his Father, is in keeping with the interior spirit of John's whole story of those resurrection hours. The majestic ordering of the women to announce to the disciples the speedy return to heaven is another touch in the realistic picture. The interview in which the Lord bade the disciple, while John was present, to view the scars on his pierced hand, now healed, and on his pierced side,

[1] Comp. Psa. xvi, 10, with Acts ii, 25, 31.

where had been inflicted a mortal wound, is given by this evangelist. The air of direct narration, with the exact words carefully set down, shows the vivid impression made on the mind of the writer. For the interview with the disciples when Thomas was with them we are indebted to John; and the additional words of blessing to all who believe without seeing are those which this evangelist would be quick to recall. Indeed, it is by introducing conversations which came up so naturally with such deeds that we get from John a clearer sense of the reality of these events than from either of the other Gospels. The interview with the seven on the shore of the Galilean Lake,[1] John again being one of the number, shows the same characteristic. It is the report of an eyewitness who had these repeated opportunities for identifying Jesus. It is the testimony of "the best friend," who in such a case cannot be deceived. It is an identification not only by eye and ear and touch, but by the whole mood of mind and heart.

If to that of the four Gospels we add the testimony of Peter, speaking for others as well as for himself, given under circumstances where contradiction was possible if there was any mistake about his facts, we shall have crowned the accumulated testimony by the very words of an eyewitness—words that cover the whole ground. He says: "God showed him openly not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after

[1] John xxi, 1-24.

he rose from the dead."[1] The superiority of such witness over that which would have been given by a more public display is too evident to require more than a mention. The fact itself is abundantly attested, and that was all that was needed.

But there are a great number of corroborative facts —facts before and facts afterward—for which it is impossible to give a rational account apart from Christ's resurrection. The witness of the angels at the sepulcher might be adduced, as also the fact that the resurrection gathered the disciples, who had been scattered by the death, as nothing else could have done; so that the gospel thenceforth was that of "Christ and the resurrection." Our Lord's own teaching about his coming resurrection and that of all men, and his coupling of the one of these events with the other, might also be dwelt upon.[2] These are things connected so closely with the direct proofs that, were the evidence not altogether conclusive, they might be fitly urged. In almost any other theme under discussion these would be named as of themselves sufficiently evidential. But they are simply superabundant here. It is enough. "Now is Christ risen from the dead."

But, while nothing valid can be offered on the other side, it has been sought to weaken rather than to destroy this immense volume of testimony.

We may safely leave the old "lethargy theory" of Schleiermacher in the grave where it was so deeply buried by Strauss—himself a destructive critic. His

[1] Acts x, 40, 41. [2] John xi, 25.

object in its burial was to find a place for his own scarcely less unfortunate theory: that of an "exalted state of mind in which the apostles honestly thought they saw a risen Lord." Strauss's theory in some form—each form of it differing from the others and usually contradicting the others—has reappeared in each generation.

It is to be noticed that this way of accounting for the event simply shifts the question from one about the fact to one about the mental state of the witnesses. Suppose they were or were not in "an exalted state of mind." In either case the fact is not touched. What if this is the rather true: that they were not in a specially exalted state of mind at the outset, but were subsequently thrilled by the evidence? The exaltation subsequent to the fact is exactly what we should expect. That after a certain event they acted in a logical way is testimony to the event, and strengthens rather than weakens the evidence. Some such event as the Lord's resurrection is needed to account for the feeling. Strauss refutes Schleiermacher's theory of "lethargy rather than death" by showing that this would destroy the moral character of Jesus, since it makes him also a perpetrator of a mistake which he used fraudulently after "the lethargy" had ended. But Strauss did not see that his own theory of "the exaltation of mind in the witnesses" destroys the moral character of the Lord himself and of his disciples as well, and this for precisely the same reason. The perpetuation of such a mistake would have come to be

the perpetuation of a known and self-acknowledged fraud on the part of both Master and disciple. Any "elevation of mind" could have been possible only at a subsequent stage of the events.

Further, the disciples, so far from craving and expecting such a thing as the Lord's bodily resurrection, and thus "creating it," did not at first recognize him. Mary Magdalene and the disciples going to Emmaus certainly had no "expected image" of a risen Christ before their minds. They did not "conceive such a person in their imagination" or "idealize him in their soul." He was the unexpected one to them. And when, on that memorable evening, the disciples are incredulous about his bodily appearance, they have to be sharply rebuked by him.

One might, in the midst of surrounding circumstances which forbade anything other than mental hallucination, accept some such thing in the case of one or two persons; but here we have twelve, and presently five hundred men. Jesus at Galilee is no figure floating indistinctly in the air, luminous only by faint radiance in a narrow room. He has a human body which offers itself to be "handled." He "eats and drinks." He utters words, linking them with words before his death. Differing in some respects, because of the more advanced stage of his resurrection life, he is manifested and is "known" to these disciples over and over again. A few special instances are given, out of many which occurred during those forty days. He takes up his old work of "the kingdom," and he makes

provision for carrying it on by their hands when he shall go back to his Father. All his ideas are those of the former Christ. Anything save the full acceptance of the fact would cast us back on the unthinkable theory of actual imposture on the part, not only of the witnesses, but of the Lord himself.

In one form of this theory it ventures on the statement that the body was "thrown aside, somewhere and somehow," and never entombed; or that all the apostles saw was a "vision." But Paul expressly says, when speaking of the belief of the early Christians which he had "received" from them, that it was a fact of common notoriety that Christ "was buried."[1] So that this disposal of the Lord's body at his death was recognized alike by friends and foes. It was placed in a sepulcher. Somehow that sepulcher was emptied. Friends and enemies alike had no motive for having it emptied. It was for the interest of both, from their opposite points of view, to keep it filled with that body. The Romans certainly would not empty it. The Jews would have liked, subsequently, to be able to produce the body, for that would have been an obvious way of meeting the testimony of the disciples. Better than any persecution for destroying the new faith would have been the simple act of producing Christ's dead body.

And what was seen and known by disciples afterward was not a "spirit," but a body: "Handle me and see; a spirit hath not flesh and bones." And the one great object in all these interviews was not new teach-

[1] 1 Cor. xv, 4.

ing, since the time for that had passed; but he would show that he, the dead in body, in body lived again, contrary to their expectations. For the ruler who had loaned him a grave, and the ruler who had furnished the perfume, and the women who had started for the sepulcher, and the "certain others" who also went with them, had all tried to keep him dead by embalming his body. So that "expectation of a resurrection, causing such exaltation of mind as to unfit them as witnesses," is a theory harder to maintain than that which Strauss sought to displace. It has not only no one fact for it, but a whole series of facts against it. It is founded on a diagnosis of the apostles' mental condition impossible for them at that time. The *bodily* appearance of their Lord was clearly enough the one thing they did not anticipate. What he had said about "rising" they had either not understood at all, as is probable, in some instances, or else, as in other instances, they had regarded it as the soul's rising from the ruins of the grave—the exact opposite of any bodily resurrection.

The "vision theory" is hardly less defensible. It is certainly contradicted by Paul. The Lord's appearance to him he believed to be a "vision" only in the sense of "something actually seen by the eyes." He insists on an actual "appearance" of his Lord to him when journeying toward Damascus. For, arguing with the Corinthians,[1] he proves bodily resurrection a possibility from the fact that it had occurred when

[1] 1 Cor. xv.

Christ's body was raised. He claims that Jesus met him in body, spoke to him, and commissioned him after the resurrection; so that he, as well as the other apostles had seen the Lord in body. Nor can we think for a moment of any "mere vision" which the truthful Lord allowed the earlier apostles, and afterward Paul also, to believe as real, without such a correction from him as would set so important a matter completely at rest. The "vision theory" hurts the apostles, but it injures their Lord more; it utterly destroys his moral character. It is far too late in the day for the serious discussion of any theory of imposture. And yet as we see the other theories depart we are shut up to this, unless the one—the only one—other alternative is adopted; namely, a real resurrection of the Lord. The absence of all motive for deceit, the testimony of so many disinterested witnesses, the agreement of so many facts going before and following the resurrection, the whole previous character of the Lord, who could not have lent himself to any imposture—these make any thought of willful imposture utterly untenable. The disciples formed, during the lifetime of each other and in the presence of a generation who could examine the facts, a great public body of witnesses whose testimony became the received Christian tradition and was the substance of the new gospel. The most prominent thing in the earliest Christian century was the preaching of "Jesus and the resurrection." Mistake would have been itself miraculous in such circumstances, while imposture is unimaginable.

And it must not be forgotten that over against any theory that discredits the actual resurrection is the completed fact of the ascension. On this matter Luke gives us clearest details. He gives the place where it occurred, the time when it took place, the order of the circumstances, the human witnesses, the angelic testimony, the parting words of the Lord, the strong impression it made on the disciples at the time, the permanent influence of it upon their subsequent career, the peculiar hopes it excited of his return to them in a similar manner to that they had seen when he ascended into the waiting cloud. Here are the graphic words in which the ascension of the Lord, its influence on the disciples as the completion of the act of resurrection, and its connection with the second advent are all given us by Luke:[1] "*And he led them out as far as Bethany. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up. And he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass that while he blessed them, he was parted from them and carried up into heaven, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And they worshiped him. While they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*" An ideal ending is the real historic ending of this earthly career. The resurrection

[1] Luke xxiv. 50 Comp Acts i, 9–11.

is completed in the ascension. The two are one in the broad thought of the Christian world.

It remains now to sum up the evidence in due order.

1. Our Lord wrought miracles during his life, and these prepare us to accept in his case the miracle of his resurrection. It was along his own line of attestation. By miracles, tending to some culminating act, he met the universal demand for such attestations at the outset of a dispensation. Miracles are for eras. They are not scattered promiscuously over the Scripture story. The miracle of creation excepted, there are no recorded miracles in the earlier story of biblical events. Just where other religions have their myths the Bible is silent about miracles. When miracles do occur it is at well-defined eras and at specific junctures; and their character is always so specific, and they are so related to other circumstances and so exactly timed, that no two of them could change places. They are credible just when and where they occur and nowhere else. And certainly they have a natural association with the idea of Jesus. For him not to have done them would have been well-nigh incredible. Their absence would have required more faith than does their presence on the biblical page; especially when we remember that they are all moral truths bursting through and revealing themselves in the material world; incarnations in which the greatest spiritual realities take on visible forms. They are not the buttress of the building, but an actual part of

the structure and of the very substance of Christianity itself.

And somewhere these miraculous illustrations of what is part and parcel of this religion should culminate. Hitherto Christ's greatest miracles had been that of others' resurrection; but now, when dead, he can raise himself out of the grave and thus show, by his own resurrection, that "he was not holden of death." In one point of view the Father "gave him the victory;" in another he is himself "the Victor." And the Scriptures present his resurrection as his culminating act. At that point the Father is represented as saying, "Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten thee."

2. Such a miracle gives him especial memory in the thought of the world. Apart from his resurrection the world's thought of him would be that the grave had conquered him; the splendor of his miracles forgotten in the sad tragedy of his death. In that case the last the world saw of him was his entrance to the grave to which in pity his friends consigned the body of one whose mission had failed. The final and fixed thought of him would be of one who after an inglorious failure filled a more inglorious grave. The "Giver of life," one of the titles he gave himself, would be terribly ironical if applied to one on whose dishonored grave the Syrian stars looked down. But if he really raised himself from the grave, then all is changed, and what had seemed a defeat becomes a triumph. Only by his death could he have had the opportunity for the great-

est conceivable victory—his resurrection. So that now the risen Christ is enthroned as the Ever-living One. He lives the more in the world's idea of him for having permitted himself to die so as to show by his resurrection and his ascension that "he lives for evermore." He had slumbered his "three days" in the grave. There was thus afforded the greatest and most complete opportunity of declaring his divinity by a peerless miracle, one that should crown all the others and exhibit the "Lord of life" in his true character before the whole world. Keenly alive to the world's idea of himself, and speaking out of heaven, where with his resurrection body he abides, he said: "I am the first and the last, and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore."[1]

3. We must remember that he promised his own resurrection. In confidential moods, alone with his disciples, he spoke of his death, told where he should die, how long he should stay in the grave, what disposition would be made of his body, and that he should rise from the dead. He did certainly declare, not only to those disciples, privately at first, but afterward openly to all the people, his coming resurrection. His open saying on this matter, perverted indeed in spirit but actual in fact, was made one of the charges at his trial. His body was not to be crushed by stoning—the Jewish form of execution—nor to be torn piecemeal by an infuriated mob. He was not to be drowned in sea or lake or river. His body was not to be cre-

[1] Rev. i, 18, Revised Version.

mated nor yet to be mysteriously taken from human vision. Nor was he to die by disease. But he was to be publicly put to death. Nor was he to be buried in a common grave, but placed in a sepulcher. He was not to be duly embalmed by loving disciples or family friends, for that body of his was to rise again. We can see that a hundred dispositions of that body would have been possible, any one of which would have thwarted the kind and manner of resurrection that he definitely predicted. The singularly minute circumstances, any one of which would have hindered that form of resurrection, were all matters of arrangement on his part before he died; but they had been so foretold that none of them were intentionally fulfilled by Jew or Gentile.

4. He was seen repeatedly by those who had best known him as a living man. These people knew that he had been placed in a certain sepulcher. They testify that they saw him afterward alive. They knew. Others had seen him only casually; had an outside and fragmentary knowledge about him. These men had been with him three years, had intimate acquaintance with him, had seen him in private and in public. The ordinary Jew saw him only occasionally, and then through the medium of a strange and blinding prejudice. Scribe and Pharisee at Jerusalem and the concourse at Capernaum had all left him when the novelty was over. They did not know him except through a medium which distorted their mental and moral vision. In any fair jury they were ruled out by prepossessions

so strong that no evidence could convince them. Incapacitated as witnesses before his death, they were as much so after his resurrection. All persons, however, who had any claim to be considered in these premises were more than satisfied, after a little, of the actual occurrence of an event they had not anticipated, and for which, in all their thinking and acting, they were wholly unprepared. And these men saw him repeatedly, at various times, in various circumstances; ate, drank, and talked with him. Names of places where these interviews occurred are set down in the record, the day of the week and the hour of the day, and what these men were doing and what was said by him and them. And all this in independent narration; each man writing for his own end and with no fear of contradiction and no sign of collusion. No man twists his fact to meet another man's fact. The obvious fairness of the writers, as well as their absolute certainty, shows itself in their story. Any serious variations in the oral gospels and any serious variations in the written, and equally any serious variations between the first oral gospels and those subsequently written, would have been discovered and exposed by both friend and foe; both classes alert, though for opposite reasons, to detect any discrepancies in any direction. This method gave double chance to objectors, if there was anything to detect in these stories of the resurrection. Repeated at the outset with that noted Eastern accuracy which, in other compositions, has preserved for us the exact words of poet, historian,

and philosopher, the time came when these oral gospels must be put into the form of written documents for the authentication of the new faith. The oral gospels had served their purpose. They were the method of the hour. Teachers of philosophy in Egypt, in Athens, and in Rome used the "unwritten volume." The foremost compositions of those centuries were first given to the world in this way. In the East, to-day, with unfailing accuracy, teachers who cannot read a word of the Koran teach it to their pupils.

This method of the "unwritten volume" had certain advantages in that earliest century. It was the witnessing of men whose earnest belief carried with it a measure of forcefulness not found in carefully written documents. It was the best way to get the story of the resurrection before the minds of that generation; for the men knew what they said when they proclaimed "Jesus and the resurrection."

So, too, it is to be observed that the new element in their Lord's resurrection life was noted by these witnesses. He was the same Lord, and yet in some added things "he showed himself alive after his passion." Another has said, "What was natural to him before is now miraculous, and what was miraculous before is now natural." And these men notice and record the change, showing themselves thereby to be very careful observers. The haggard look is gone. He is so fresh that Mary at first thinks he is the gardener. The feet on which, three days before, it would have been impossible to stand are now so healed that he can

walk to Emmaus with the disciples—though the healing has left the scars of the wound. He comes and goes in a new way. His new resurrection joins exactly to his old ante-resurrection life, but it is a more exalted stage of living.

And besides the physical evidences these men are afforded the more decisive moral proofs. To soul as well as to sense the appeal is made. Each disciple finds his spiritual aptitude specially addressed, and yet always there is the one idea of "the kingdom of God" in Christ's new life as in his old. The same spirit, aim, tone, purpose, is in the risen Christ, so that they know him mentally and spiritually as well as physically. He meets all their wants.

5. They were anything but credulous at the outset. The thing which was absolutely unexpected had occurred. They not only did not lean toward the belief in a resurrection, they leaned the other way. The danger was in their unwillingness to be fair, at first, to the testimony. They had to see for themselves. One of them wanted not only the evidence of his eyes and his ears, but that of touch. This man thought—and rightly, apart from a change in the body of the Lord—that there would be the gaping wounds that had not yet time for healing. Christ ought to be, so he thought, if not dead, then next kin to a dead man. He is going to expose the too swift faith of the others by asking about the spear thrust, and the feet disabled forever by the cruel nails. He sees the healed wounds, and is invited to thrust his hand into the cavity still

left. It is enough. It is more than enough. He cries out, in the astonishment of his faith, "My Lord and my God." These men yielded their original incredulity only after a struggle.

6. We must recall also the fact of the multitude of witnesses. At one time five hundred of those who had previously known him were assembled for an appointed interview. It was in Galilee, where he had spent most of his life and done most of his work. He was probably the best-known man in that section of Palestine. It was arranged that these five hundred disciples should be able, each one of them, to say, "I have seen Jesus of Nazareth alive after his death." So far as we know, not one of them ever proved false to his testimony. Had a solitary instance of this occurred, active opponents would have had the counter testimony of such a one published to the world, and the fact would have not been allowed to be lost. Before the last of these men who saw the Lord had died many thousands of men had become believers, and among them were persons of eminence who could have examined these witnesses and have ascertained for themselves the truth about these things.

And enemies were compelled to own the facts and devise ways of accounting for them. In the most skeptical age the world ever saw the appeal was made to the Gospels as books authentically recording the Christian beliefs, and among those beliefs not one was more prominent than that Jesus had risen. There was skepticism on all subjects in Palestine. So, too, on

the European continent, Athenian thought held all beliefs about the gods in a kind of polite indifference. Nor was Rome credulous. Our Lord expresses, on one occasion, his wonder at the prevalence of a disposition in that age toward unbelief on all subjects. This mood, however, was inevitably followed by a rebound toward faith. Men began to feel that facts were facts, and that they must in some way be accounted for. Then came the question, when Christ's resurrection was brought forward, "What became of that dead and buried body?" It was seen that all parties, each one from a different motive, had actually conspired to keep that tomb filled with the Lord's body. But it was certain that the tomb was emptied. "How?" and then, "Why?" and, "By whom?" The only clear and consistent theory of that emptied tomb was that its occupant was raised from the dead. In a little time, because there was no other way of accounting for the empty tomb, men began to discuss the Gospel story of it. In this new situation the appeal was to the recorded testimony of the early disciples, and friends and foes alike made this appeal.

7. So, too, it is a matter of history that immediately this resurrection became an article of faith in all Christian churches without exception. Within a week the disciples declared it, and in sixty days this was recognized by all Jerusalem as the public claim of the new religion. It was the most prominent thing that was held forth by the Christian community. It was declared in the very courts of the temple. From that

time forth it takes its place as the one great fact indorsing and corroborating the religion of Jesus. The day of the week on which he rose was taken and used, and has been used from that time to this, as the Lord's day—the day of the Lord's resurrection. It was used for Christian worship, and it gradually superseded the Judaic Sabbath. It was held that, while the seventh day of the week was the day for the Jew as a Jew, the first day of the week was the proper day for the Christian as a Christian, the moral requirement being that of one day in each seven. And the Jewish version of the moral law, after stating the principle of one seventh, was held to authorize the seventh day only for the Jew. Under apostolic guidance the observance of the first day began, and by the demand of Christian thought and feeling it has continued, and the only reason for this was that it celebrated the resurrection of the Lord.

And the two ordinances given in charge to the churches commemorate, one the death of Jesus, the other his resurrection.

8. The bearing of this fact upon New Testament doctrine is seen in all the Epistles. Symmetrical is evidential truth. The resurrection is the complement truth to the death. Nothing could be imagined more unfinished than such a career if it had closed with the disaster of the cross. But add to the cross the resurrection and the ascension, and its aspect is changed in a moment; and both stand related to the fully rounded doctrine of Christianity. The Living One is the giver of a life for the soul which is so completely regenera-

ting that it must carry with it the vitalizing of the bodies of the "dead in Christ" at "the last day." "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies."[1] Resurrection is regeneration expressed in physical form. The soul's resurrection now, and that of the body by and by, are both ours by the ministration of the Holy Spirit. But the gift of the Holy Spirit is conditioned on the resurrection of the Lord. So that the vitality of Christian doctrine, which is the chief thing about it, is both secured and expressed in the resurrection of Jesus. It is the golden clasp that binds all truth into one perfected system. Without it "we are of all men most miserable;"[2] with it we are of all men most secure in our belief and most certain of our salvation. We are not to think of the Lord's resurrection as a mere appendix to our religion. It is a fundamental part of our Christianity. It is not to be considered simply as a buttress; it is part and parcel of the building itself. Tear out this course of masonry which runs round all the walls of the structure and you would have a mass of unsightly ruins. We are justified in believing in Christ as our Lord only by the completed fact of his resurrection.[3]

Of the argument drawn from our Lord's resurrection for the resurrection of all believers we may not now speak; but it may be noted that many Christians, facing the fact that at some time they must themselves

[1] Rom. viii, 11. [2] 1 Cor. xv, 19. [3] Rom. iv, 25.

die, have had a peculiar consolation as they have remembered that the Christ not only entered upon death but passed through it and came up out of it unharmed. He is therefore especially credited when he speaks on the matter of a Christian's death and resurrection. He took possession of the "keys of death and of Hades[1]—the keys of both entrance and exit. The Conqueror can unlock both doors, and so is shown to be one who can open the further door for his people —insuring short, swift passage for them. Jesus himself has gone through. He lingered a little—just long enough to know all there is to be met. He lingered that we might not stay. He was "the first to rise from the dead."[2] There had been approximations, there had been resuscitations, but there had been no resurrection of one who "dieth no more." Christ lingered in the abode of the dead so as to bless death in the thought of the dying. He emerged with "the keys," for all true believers, at his resurrection. Death is not so terrible since he tarried. It is sure to end in resurrection since he rose. Another has sung:

"I stood within the grave's o'ershadowing vault,
Gloomy and damp it stretched its vast domain.
Shades were its boundary; for my strained eye sought
For other limits for its width in vain.

"I lit a torch at a sepulchral lamp
Which shot a thread of light amid the gloom;
And feebly burning 'gainst the rolling damp
I bore it through the regions of the tomb.

[1] Rev. i, 19. [2] Acts xxvi, 23.

"Around me stretched the slumbers of the dead,
Whereof the silence ached upon mine ear;
More and more noiseless did I note my tread,
And yet its echoes chilled my heart with fear.

"Death's various shrines—the urn, the stone, the lamp—
Were scattered 'round, confused amid the dead.
Symbols and types were moldering in the damp,
Their shapes were wanting and their meaning fled.

"Unspoken tongues, perchance of praise or woe,
Were chronicled on tablets Time had swept;
And deep were half their letters hid below
The thick small dust of those they once had wept.

"One place alone had ceased to hold its prey:
A form had pressed it, and was there no more;
The garments of the grave beside it lay
Where once they wrapped Him on the rocky floor.

"He only with returning footsteps broke
The eternal calm with which the tomb was bound;
Among the sleeping dead alone He woke
And blessed, with outstretched hands, the dead around."

But the resurrection of the Lord, great and glorious as it is, does not stand as the finishing act of the divine program. It left the Lord upon the earth. It has not restored him to heaven. One more act is needed to complete his career. Ascension is simply the perfection of resurrection. The ascension is the crowning event. It ends the scene of which his rising from the grave was the beginning.

There was to be expected from Luke, who makes such careful statements of detail concerning the virgin birth, an equally definite statement of the closing event

on Olivet. The other writers of the New Testament give the broad facts. Godet calls attention to the "innumerable declarations of the Epistles (Paul, Peter, Hebrews, James) which speak of the heavenly glory of Jesus and of his sitting at the right hand of God." But the details are necessarily wanting in the doctrinal forms of statement which abound in the Epistles. It is, indeed, true that the first we hear of the ascension comes from Christ's own prophetic words about the "Son of man ascending up where he was before."[1] And he grew to speak more frequently about it in his later ministry. He was going to "prepare mansions" and "coming again to receive" his disciples.[2] He was not yet "ascended to the Father."[3] He was offering petitions for his followers that they "might behold his glory that he had with the Father before the world was."[4]

The time has come. Jesus makes especial preparation for the event. He convenes the disciples. They are the prepared witnesses to the ascension. It has been proposed that we render the phrase "assembled with them"[5] by the phrase "having assembled them." If this demand of high scholarship is granted, the definiteness of the arrangement and its distinct purposefulness are even more manifest. "He led them out" is another of the definite touches in the narrative. It was no accidental meeting; no sudden appearance

[1] John vi, 62. The Greek has the participial form, which forbids any other than a literal ascension.

[2] John xiv, 2, 3.

[3] John xx, 17, 18.

[4] Comp. John xvii, 6, with xvii, 24.

[5] Acts i, 4.

among them such as had frequently occurred since his resurrection. And he "led them out until they were over against Bethany."[1] In the outline given in Luke we read, "He lifted up his hands, and blessed them; and while he blessed them he parted from them and was carried up into heaven."[2] But when, in the Acts, Luke completes his sketch he says "a cloud received him out of their sight."[3] The ascension was gradual. For we read that "while he blessed them, he parted from them," and "was taken up;" and that "they looked steadfastly toward heaven."[4] All this was unlike the sudden appearances and "vanishings out of their sight" which had been the peculiarities of manifestations during those memorable "forty days." These men were witnesses of the facts. These facts formed a part of the oral gospel preached by them for years. And the record of these facts, promised by the Lord himself,[5] is given us by the most painstaking and careful investigator in the apostolic band; by the man who was the close companion afterward of the apostle Paul. In their journeying they must have often gone over these facts with each other. And so the narrative comes to us with the indorsement of the most acute men in the apostolic band. And the angel witnesses must not be overlooked as they testify to his ascension "into heaven" and connect it with his "coming again." Thus the ascension perfects the resurrection and the Lord resumes his native heaven.

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[1] Luke xxiv, 50, Revised Version.
[2] Luke xxiv, 51.
[3] Acts i, 9.
[4] Acts i, 10, 11.
[5] John xvi, 12, 13.

This discussion has been confined to the opening and closing events of a most marvelous career, but it has been difficult at every step of the argument to avoid drawing the obvious conclusion as to the fitness of part to part and of each part to the wonderful whole. Such an arrival on these mortal shores and such a departure to the heaven whence he came carry with them, inevitably, in all just thinking minds, some such intervening life as that so grandly set forth in the Epistles and so simply and graphically described in the Gospels. These parts go well together. Each demands the other. All are essential to the completed idea. It is one and the same person who is thus born and lives, dies and rises. Any one of these things taken alone, and incredible of any ordinary man, becomes credible of Him in whom they all are assembled. They go together as the one seamless robe. They are true, and true only of Him who fulfills all ideals of the "Son of man" who was also the "Son of God."

And the power of such a conviction, obtained as the result of careful study of these Christian facts, is beyond all description to one who finds that he can supplement his inward persuasion with the immense reinforcement of historic proof. Such a man henceforth knows not only what he believes but why he believes it.

There comes also, as the result of such study the conviction that the future of the human race is connected with this Christ. He may be rejected by those who live along the course of the immediate centuries, as by many in the centuries of the past; but these re-

jections, as in the parable of the supper, are so managed that more come to the gospel feast in the end. "My house shall be filled." In the coming eras Christ will be accepted by the vast mass of the human race. The culminating centuries will do him honor. He is to reign King of kings and Lord of lords. The ascended Christ completes the idea of the "ascent of man." He was "the Son of man;" the ideal man not only in character, but in the realization of humanity. In him the "lost race" becomes the "found race;" and with him, as the ascended Christ, will be gathered that "great multitude," which no man can number, "of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," who stand "before the throne, and before the Lamb."

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